# Sulfur 36

ROBERT DUNCAN ON CHARLES OLSON
POETRY BY MICHEL DEGUY, HORACIO COSTA, ANDRE DU BOUCHET, INGER CHRISTENSEN, MYUNG MI KIM
EDWARD SCHELB ON ROBERT KELLY
GARY SNYDER ON LANGUAGE

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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 (telephone: 313/483-9787). New York Editorial Office: 202 West 10 St., New York, NY 10014. Subscriptions are $14 (2 issues) for individuals, $20 for institutions. Current issue #36 is Vol. XV, #1. Single issues are $9.00. Foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $4.00 for book rate mail or $10 for air mail. Make checks payable to SULFUR in *U.S. Currency Drawn on U.S. Bank*. Back issues (except for #1, #17, #19, and #22) are available. CLAIMS FOR MISSING NUMBERS will be honored only within 3 months after publication. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN #: 0730-305X. *Sulfur* is indexed by the American Humanities Index.



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COVER DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN
TYPESETTING BY LAZERTYPE, SANTA ROSA, CA

Distributed by Bernard DeBoer, Inc.; Small Press Distribution; Inland; Ubiquity; & Spectacular Diseases, England

SPRING 1995

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART


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**COVER: LA MUJER JINETE** by Francisco Toledo (grabado sobre papel, 45 cm x 90 cm, 1991, Colección Galería López Quiroga, fotografía: Artes de Mexico)



1995 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The English Department, and The World College of Eastern Michigan University.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

# INGER CHRISTENSEN

## *from* ALPHABET

*(Tr. from the Danish*
*by Pierre Joris)*

9

ice ages exist, ice ages exist,
ice of the arctics and ice of the kingfisher;
cicadas exist, chicory, chrome

and the chrome yellow iris, the blue iris; oxygen
indeed; also ice floes in the arctic ocean,
polar bears exist, as fur inscribed
with an individual number he exists, condemned to his life;
and the kingfisher's mini-drop into the ice-blue rivers

of mars exists, if the rivers exist;
if oxygen in the rivers exists, oxygen
indeed; exists indeed there where the cicadas'
i-songs exist, there indeed where chicory
heaven exists blue dissolved in

water, the chrome yellow sun, oxygen
indeed; it will exist for sure, we will
exist for sure, the oxygen we breathe exists,
eye of fire crown of fire exist, and the heavenly
inside of the lake; a handle infolded
with bulrushes will exist, an ibis exists,
and the movements of the soul inhaled into clouds
exist, like oxygen storms deep inside Styx
and in the heart of wisdom's landscape ice-light,
ice identical with light, and in the inner
heart of the ice-light emptiness, live, intense

like your gaze in the rain, that fine life-
iridescent rain where gesture-like
the fourteen crystal lattices exist, the seven
crystalline systems, your gaze in mine,
and Icarus, impotent Icarus exists;

Icarus swaddled in melting waxwings
exists; Icarus pale as a corpse in
civvies exists, Icarus all the way down where
the pigeons exist; dreamers, dolls
exist; the dreamers' hair with cancerous tufts
torn out, the dolls' skin pinned together
with nails, rotting wood of the mysteries; and smiles
exist, Icarus' children white as lambs
in the gray light, will indeed exist, indeed
we will exist, and oxygen on oxygen's crucifix;
as hoarfrost we will exist, as wind we will exist,
as the rainbow's iris, in the shining shoots of
mesembryanthenum, in the tundra's straw; small

we will exist, as small as bits of pollen in peat,
as bits of virus in bones, as swamp pink maybe
maybe as a bit of white clover, vetch, a bit of chamomile
exiled to the lost again paradise; but darkness
is white say the children, the darkness of paradise is white,
but not white as a coffin is white,
that is if coffins exist, and not
white as milk is white,
that is if milk exists; white is white,
the children say, darkness is white, but not
white as the white existing
before fruit trees existed, their flowering so white,
darkness is whiter, eyes melt

10

june night exists, june night exists,
sky finally as if lifted up to celestial

heights and simultaneously pushed down as gently as when
dreams are visible before being dreamed; a space like
swooned, like saturated with whiteness, a timeless

knell of dew and insects, and nobody in this
gossamer, nobody understands that
autumn exists, that aftertaste and afterthought
exist, only these restless lines of fantastic
ultrasounds exist and the bat's
jade-ear turned towards the ticking fog;
never was the globe's inclination so beautiful,
never were the oxygenated nights so white,

so dispassionately dissolved, softly ionized
white, and never was the limit of invisibility so nearly
touched; june, june, your jacob's ladders
exist your sleeping beasts and their dreams of sleep
exist, a flight of galactic germs between
the earth so earthy and heaven so heavenly,
the calm of the valley of tears, so calm and the tears
sunk back, sunk back in like groundwater again
underground; earth; the earth in its revolution
around the sun exists; the earth in its itinerary
through the milky way exists; the earth on its way
with its load of jasmine, and of jasper and iron,
with its curtains of iron, its portents of joy and random Judas
kisses and a virgin anger
in the streets, jesus of salt; with the jacaranda's shadow
on the waters of the river, with falcons and hunters
and january in the heart, with the well of Japoto della Quercias
Fonte Gaia in Sienna and with july
as heavy as a bomb; with tame brains,
with heart jars or heart grass or berries,
with the roots of ironwood in the exhausted earth

the earth that Jayadeva sings in his mystic
12 century poem; the earth with its coastline
of conscience, blue and with nests

where the large heron exists, with its neck curved
blue-gray, or the small heron exists, mysterious
and shy, or the night heron, the ash-colored heron exist
and the degrees of wing beats of sparrows, of cranes
and pigeons; the earth with Jullundur, Jabalpur and
Jungfrau exists, with Jotunheim and the Jura
exists, with Jabron and Jambo, Jogkarta
exists, with earth-swirls and earth-smoke exists
with water masses, landmasses, earthquakes exists,
with Judenburg, Johannesburg and the Jerusalem of Jerusalems

•

atombombs exist

Hiroshima, Nagasaki

Hiroshima 6
august 1945

Nagasaki 9
august 1945

140,000 dead and
wounded in Hiroshima

about 60,000 dead and
wounded in Nagasaki

frozen numbers
somewhere in a distant
and ordinary summer

since then the wounded
have died, many at first, indeed
most, then fewer, but in the end

all; in the end
the children of the wounded,
stillborn, dying,

many, continuously,
some, finally the
last ones; in my kitchen

I stand and peel
potatoes; the faucet
runs and nearly
covers the noise of the
children in the yard;

the children yell and
nearly cover the noise
of the birds in
the trees; the birds
sing and nearly

cover the murmur
of the leaves in the wind;
the leaves murmur
and nearly cover
the silence of the sky,

the sky which is light
and the light which since
then has nearly
resembled the fire
of the atom bomb

## A NOTE ON INGER CHRISTENSEN

Inger Christensen—poet, novelist, essayist—is the foremost Danish experimentalist of her generation. Maybe her single finest work to date, *Alfabet* (1981) is a book-length poem using two reticulating systems: the alphabet (that adamic, prelapserian state of language, as Roland Barthes suggests, because it is pre-word and pre-syntax, and thus before misuse, lying, rhetoric, polysemy are possible) and the Fibonacci series (where each number is the sum of the two previous ones, i.e.: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144...) Thus the first section of the poem is one line long and starts with an "A," the second 2 lines long, and starts with a "B." etcetera). Concerning the series, Christensen has said in an interview:

> It was by accident that I found out about the Fibonacci series. These numerical ratios exist in nature—the way a leek wraps around itself from the inside, and the head of a sunflower, are all based on this series. That's what's so amazing. The series itself and its peculiarities are more extraordinary than any poetry collection could be. A book of poetry becomes a metaphor for a mathematical series, rather than vice-versa.

On her use of systematic procedures for composing poetry, she told the same interviewer:

> By using a system you are trying to reveal the rhythm of the universe. In the creation story, first there is silence, and then come patterns. . .a useful benefit of a system is that you can't just write the first thing that comes into your mind; because of the resistance of the system you get onto the track of something that you wouldn't otherwise have thought of. The gift is that you are forced to put much more of the world into the poem. Sometimes it feels as though the poem is carrying you along. You have access to a universe that begins to carry you. . .into something that you would never have been able to see or write.

The rhythmic-syntactic base-line of the poem is the first line's joyous affirmation ("apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist")—modulated, as the poem takes in more of the world, by the noted existence of destruction and evil. While the early sections are single units, with the seventh letter ('g')—which in the Fibonacci series corresponds to 21—these units start to decompose into stanzas, and with section ten ('i'—89 lines) into separate poems. As each section foregrounds words starting with the alphabetically corresponding letter, translation tends to lose some of the systematicity. (Thus in section 9, the Danish word "is" easily yields the English "ice," but in the next section, the "j" of Danish "jorden" is lost in its English translation "earth.")

—P.J.

# JEAN DONNELLY

## ETTARD

our costume itches a lake of three
my pedals launch a buckled actor
your hammock gaze
the girl itch a fiery onyx

if an ink antic cuffs our shared blink
or the hedge mote our fingers pitch
will you stay
will you turn that way

the poppy lapses a blown patrol
the shift of deciduous cities
our smoke plot our jargon badger
a wry bed of yank & curtain

this dense perch was once a straw god
having since jostled a vow lock
a bandage echo in a shoulder of carbon
our gasp dissolves the accuracy of the film

it is just as decisive to foist an erotic luster
as to waltz a penance lawn
but your lip purchase stuns my crumpled button
that soap ledger no longer ribbons a plea

in the brow scuffle
in the come-hither-hook
with our dull floss & blushing
we have an orbit story to browse a map fraction

I could plait your brambles to mother my flag
oblige my four honest boatmen
they've tuned my thistle score
I husband this hut of trusses to seal my reckless nut

if only the countess could scale the iron scarlet
it's not an armed harbor
but a frost rug
a boot nation we post & boulder

# AVIVA BOWER

## FIVE POEMS

### INTOXICATION OF TRANSGRESSION

breach of silver gutted contracts lapses back
contumacious inroads to slips and lapses
strung on memories burning cord, these
burnished trespasses made a jewelry of seditions
inroads along the neck
you carry them elegantly
you carry them to a path
bounds broken bracken and underleaf spoors
all down to last lapses—stolen!
and pressing in, the saturated airs of slips and lapses
makes inroads, but your path holds
tumescent intoxicated you fill it and
overstep bounds broken in to you

### SEE

Scumbled leaden and mercurial resins the lake surface
Umber and chalk singular waves in wake and wake
Onto the whale back cliffs topaz bands break
Pebbles each daubed on each

And transparent water
And wash of thrown verdure across the bay
Water
And stippled in, moment to moment
As memory to memory, as word to word

## ANAGLYPH

That day and night there is a darkling struggle and when, finally a whole weekend of sleep or the days get a bit longer living only a few hours from the arctic circle a circle so tight as to know the earth is round, so certain that it may as well be flat, you see you've been dragging language behind you like a heavy tool and you leave it at the threshold of a very funny memory that's just returned and that you tell and the laughter points the way to a hill of paths and bread and wine and the circle of conversations so drunken that even the metaphor is a hilarious tool that touched itself in a kind of promise that someday language would touch itself too and stop being a tool and be that first thing, that the world would rush in and be there first and we would be silently standing in it too, well then the anagogic seems to rise as the sun and spread the potential like a road up the peninsula.

## EMULSIONS

The senses, sad and true as sun-paled cellulose acetate
present-bound only for the seconds of a purchase

The senses, immiscible with the water and the World
But in the little world they neither mix nor break
But they milk something out

The colloidal senses
The hand and eye and mouth, a colloid
Not immiscible perhaps as they
Flash worlds onto the screen's flesh
"Never disclosed, but hastened to again"
Even the seamless time of promising past and future
A thick delicious globe in the wide and wide mind

In these straits of emulsion
A tremendous heat is needed to believe
In the myth of the World

The senses war their pieces together and apart
Power's waxy light and charge here too are
And through emulsion's channels runs only war
Where there is little space to breathe free for some
And others no breath at all
Come, let it be and not breathe

## AT THE RODIN MUSEUM

"Thought"
the smooth chin above the marble block

blind eyes
no torso
no inward glance
rather
thought takes her light
from the eyes in the museum
lit from below
from the marble
lit from the shadows
I am thought

the others
the pressure of the living
in the volcanic pressures of watching
make a stone
a beautiful girl
whose lips will part
who lives in stone
clawed to waves
shirred to drape
death's bruised stone

stone
that has recrystallized under great pressure
my head
under the pressure of the living
has reformed into crystals of tears
which do not move
but are frozen before spoken
and petrify my mouth
a welt of tears forms my mouth
marble bruised and punched
bruised and punched
my head
powdered under the bouchard's rows of teeth
the claw's mark
shirred on the waste rock
the pounding of the rock
echoes silently in the house

I am the thought
that your gaze sustains
I am the thought
that you want to live
my eyes are blinded
with the tears
you hold back
wanting the dead to live
willing the living to live on
crying to move grains of marble in a filmy gaze

My life
is the unsteady light your eyes bring
to the stone at my throat


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# SHARON THESEN

## GALA ROSES

If it's not flowing I'll not tell
not to ask me neither under the lilac nor upon the bedspread
a secret fig green orb a mouth the size fills
inside perfectly & juice a slight muscular taking
a trout in the boat under the sun's
tremor the sly slight feather the fisherman strokes
words upon you oh body oh stone lintel and maiden frieze
lifting high the garland gala roses white lilies
legs draped heavy satin skirting heads crowned braided
sung & caught by nets your sheer wings beauty
her gateway fig-mouth and trout so slips down

Was fast the shift to blankness the nape of neck's
adorable space many catastrophes could & have befallen
axes have fallen upon fair bent heads still speaking
*don't think about it don't listen* the dog is advised re
the nature of his operation & moans of pity no no
refuse to be bitter neither will he nor she all
friends & happy in the skin of some accommodation stretched
beyond bearing goes loose in the mind—covered saintlike
in arrows walking to work not screaming not yelling a kind word

the mailman the butcher the old woman rambling alone book in
[hand
kerchief & housedress a pocketful of amethysts & quartz crystal

Orange silk triangles shine from the berber kelim
green & blue oasis water sweetness pregnant moon adrift
large above the stucco the pointed rooflines grave
& magnificent occasions *it feels so good* entwined you my
darling my sweetheart the years each one lost to us
added on to sorrow's sad amazed boat nudging nudging
the wharf's oily edge blackened posts wavering
moon-blackened water's profound & frightful mirror
*led here* by what sure footedness *quietness & passion*
with or without him it them you see you big whatevers
going in and out like breathing I can't help it

Form follows whitely next the big tree shaded
fruitless not full of speeches like King Lear apoplectic
upholstered beneath the tent of his rent sub-
conscious we read as libretto to folly & lust
virtue's adventure high above nodding
here there to then below dirty-faced with cockney spraddle

good sense good rhymes or not-bad chocolate bar
some poor guy had to leave during the storm scene
passing knees in near tears mine also that people
idiotic in castles' granite chill behind the unicorns
draperies & trumpets strumpets waggle hips
blue skirts the young princes point at

Sour cream egg whites coconut icing sugar mountainous
sweetness missing the book of favorites my lord and saviour
*wants me for a sunbeam* others too but I sing me he wants me
eyebeams coiled on the violets river-bank pregnant
by mandrake root or thought *two hearts two hearts that beat as one* covered over the site with leaf mould undid the night
pointed the way down the aisle's little footpath lites
two fingers each hand point to the exits existence outside
jumping into heaven's thought clouds blue peace cold wind
floating throne river of stars the big lap
and book the white chest, odor of father comes now

Illumination marches thoughtless around in shorts
*watch out where you're going* map turned this way
that way north switched to south
yanked round to north again whacked

off course *within human memory* velikovsky imagines venus
came so close she threw the earth off its spinning
broke necks with suddenness massive reversals hence
concussive reeling waters slop beehives coil whales dive
ant colony exudes itself a grayish pile by the roadside's
hairpin turn lake blasting blue & huge mountainous cold
planet of *seas and vapors, mud, fire, and dust*

Red head of rose partitions the vase lip
he gave me relaxed on the porch charming bare
arm offering sweet muscles long curve I'll take
too then taking took mine so entwined twinned arms oh
well the picnic today so fry chicken all morning
dip egg dip crumbs lay down in the brilliant cooking
ocean floating things persons dog paddling
old & sandy muzzled sneezing wagging creature full
moon moaning through clouds & trees she chants
the puzzle of the blessed virgins virginity but
things do happen emma laraine's daughter smiling due
[november 12

Triste tropiques bristle of boat stems at the yacht club
ocean sways round turquoise peaks long as Indonesia

tips obscured toes dipped in the sea for a feeling of *out*
*there* we made it to maybe we'll go somewhere we'll
*be okay* as of this day at the park looking
for a familiar posture or hair or gesture on the green
*nice to see so many families* jungle gyms hibachi smoke
weather-talk clouds clearing the breaking in two
and into twos the coil of something—helpless resemblance
& architecture of long forgotten desire remaining an *indepth*
*report* HELP ME bottle bobbing its message too late probably

Hammering fixes looseness plunging the wayward turd
sunshine neck-rash heat flush orgone headache gap-tooth
concealed smile invites the neighbour for tea just over
the flu finally ready to cope with the white hydrangea
purchase to clamber around the house-front a viney apron
I hide my face in boo-hoo I cry mother pats me
*there there* fixing sheets to the line hot & windy dark hair
blowing & out the car window us in the back or
over by the gas station long weeds tight
budded yellow flowers red rocket tips pale violet surrender
to who's responsible who picks it up and runs with it

Green machine beyond the ruby dahlias & empty
town without you-him-it a gap thinking fills overflows
scrolled as music coiling out the mouth of the alto
*love's refrain* ornamented elizabethan *garden*
*wall where stars are bright* imagination hides her purple
violets *such sweet sorrow* striates the mind like bar codes
dragged over a dark star a price appearing or someone
at the door with a seven-rap tattoo shave-and-a-haircut
the drag queens' audience drab by the default's wild
fuschia gloves silver gowns mountainous bo-peep wigs
the gallantry stiff shoulders and exaggerated mouth of her
continuous birth

big dipper's steam shovel
permanently on strike zenith of summer summit of green &
breezes the Queen is here walking along the rows
of soldiers chests or in a late-model convertible we hold
to her civet cat robes & make petitions to keep
to life and love the living and dear God I cried
*bring him back* on my knees on stones of the earth some birds
at it in the ripening plum tree the sun out oh Christ
I cried & arose the day as usual bright & fractious
sweet juices jamming the beaks of the crows &
their ancient nightsome noisome

Accorded the morning its habit & rhythm, rain clouds
kitty litter *little things that drive you crazy* whining
race cars round the stadium going nowhere unhelpful
attachments of the vacuum cleaner hose uncoiling
the one with the headlamp that roars & grabs at the rug
fallen dahlia petals white paper dots from the 3-hole punch
waiting for him to come & the courier also & also her what if
they come while you're out & miss the rap the doorbell
messenger in uniform his parcel his brown truck & quickness
*just in case* bring out the blue & white cups blue & white saucers
gala of milky breasts pouring a funnel of stars and
rain on my ornamental plum

# ROBERT DUNCAN

## PROJECTIVE PROJECT: CHARLES OLSON[1]

Some time in 1948 a teeny-weeny monograph of poems arrived about yay-big. And I opened it and read the poems. Or four of them. There might have been three but I'm going to read the three I had right off here. I thought, well, so the jerk thinks he can write poetry and threw it in the waste paper basket. That's the nearest I came to, and the longest I came to having a first edition of a first book by Charles Olson.[2]

I had met him, as Charles has given account, and as I think I have given account in interviews, when he was doing work on the West on a Guggenheim. We talked how cities have to invent ways of ripping farmers off in order to get food. All the way through open war and mayhem and everything else, even to selling them refrigerators. Anything they could think of. Improving their standard of living. The perfect examples of such cities would be Moscow off in the snow needing something from the Ukraine that the Ukraine didn't need back from Moscow, so that the people in cities get adroit at selling furs to wear in hot weather and anything else they could. This was right exactly in the homeland of Charles Olson. And so I had a marvelous time, and met somebody who certainly talked as much as I did. We eventually, ah, I think, almost immediately, we discovered how to talk, but certainly as we knew each other over years we discovered how to talk. We talked at the same time and listened. There were only two of us. The only thing is, Charles is just hanging in there knowing I'm going to fatigue at some point. And then meanwhile I've got a few reserves. But that would be about the way we talked.

Creeley and Duncan were another thing. In those days that was talking all night and walking all night and sometimes there would be an interchange. The only way I really ever hear a monologue is by going to *My Dinner With André* which I think I'll see about ten times because I discovered I not only liked being a monologist but my unfortunate drive toward being a monologist has deprived me of other monologues around—and now you can go to the movies for two hours and fifteen minutes of hearing one.[3]

But I have another reason to start out with these three poems because hidden in them is quite a bit. And thinking about "Projective Verse" and

returning to the matter of Olson just for this evening and thinking about us sitting here today, it seems to me that you encounter the shock of the roaring male rapist, that women have been talking about, in an unbelievable way in Olson. You will hear it—and you'll hear it even in this first one—these fantasies, these male fantasies that nowadays we keep trying to say "surely that's projection on your part. Here are all these nice boys sitting around. What are you talking about?" You'll hear it in here too. This is really deep. . . .If you had to have a record of our times, Olson has, as only a poet can, a deep record of a hidden man's house from which this poetry comes.

Something more than the picture is that society is patristic, but Olson's was in an entirely patristic world. I mean, the figure of his father is huge in his mind and then Maximus and then the huge father figures that appear, bigger than all that, are amazing in his poems.

[reads "The K"][4]

Now this is almost the beginning. There's poetry before this but let's say at least this is where this poetry began for me. On that day that I received it, I read the three poems totally without understanding. So I didn't want them laid on top of me and threw them in the waste paper basket. But at the end, when we're actually up against the fact of death that's projected in the first poem, as they emerge and define, so this was something more than a first book. Many a first book doesn't even belong to the poetry. When poetry bursts out, it's usually at a later date. And if it does belong to the first poetry as it did with the case of W.S. Merwin, then suddenly very often the rest of the poetry will just be holding the office that the first one put the poet into.[5]

But a change that I find quite shocking comes in it. In this one "the night has a love for throwing its shadows around a man/ a bridge, a horse, the gun, a grave," and it may read almost "around a man, a bridge, a horse, a gun, a grave" but the line is four. A bridge, a horse, the gun, a grave, and the *Maximus* closes with not *a* wife, *a* car, *a color* and *a* self, or *the* wife, *the* car, *the* color, and *the* self, but with *my* wife, *my* car, *my* color, and *my* self.[6] Even larger things in the last year. So this is something of the tension of the poem and the projective.

Think of this. I mean, this is years and years later, after Charles really holds on and knows the whole course of the thing. He was trained to know it in American Studies and to know there were great figures in the nineteenth-century that embody that spirit, and to feel that himself. Again, the matter of fathers and sons was filial in the lines of descent. "The night has a love for throwing its shadows around a man," and we have later, "myself, like my father, in the picture of the shadow on the rock."

But I wanted to find another four here. I come to it anyway with these place marks. They don't tell me anything until I find this place. When we come back to it you'll see how much it moves [me]. Unless I decided it

wouldn't. . . . "These born again. . ." and towards the end "my" will come in—"my world" or "my time." Now I will have to find it to see what it was. The second poem, "La Préface," is really the thing out of which another aspect that we will then meet. . . .I'll start with it and then read the "Projective Verse" essay itself and you'll see it right away, which is a contrast. And the urgency itself which Charles Olson felt about choosing open form at war with closed form. Open and closed. And it's a proposition of "La Préface."

[reads "La Préface"][7]

It wouldn't be until Jack Clarke years later that Olson would consent, really, to read Blake.[8] The Blake underground there. Not having gone through an English major although (with American Studies as a focus), Olson would have been acquainted with Blake, but he kept his distance and argued against the Blake he hadn't read. Until there was the point when someone made an appointment with Blake. I'm going to get across here the appointment with Blake as I unfold my own picture of the projective. [Here] is a place where I still have a great deal of agreement indeed with the Olson I see.

Today Blake's in every poem so I wouldn't worry about styles. It would be a courtesy not to believe you have an appointment. There's a whole period where it's one of those things you mention. And it comes in this poem when the man doesn't want it. It does mean an appointment. And he's sure to have it. And he will recognize it when it arrives. Underground by the way is not only Blake's underground. It doesn't enter the poem. But it certainly entered his life and the questions about poetry. The one underground does indeed enter the poem very early. "Big Man" is in a story Olson wrote fairly early, which is also [about] his father, Olson's father was also big.[9] Olson was—I always think he was seven feet four but—and I was absolutely dismayed at one point when I thought I had been very very clever indeed. I got Parkinson to introduce Charles Olson and I saw that Tom Parkinson was actually taller than Olson.[10] I didn't believe it, because he was one big man in my mind. But "Big Man" grows. [He] is actually a proto-Maximus, and at a level, by the way, that Olson writing me when I assumed *that,* sort of kidding around, said that it hadn't occurred to him that Maximus—that's a big one. I mean, he was an expert at not having it occur to him, the very thing he was working on. I mean, of course it occurred to him in the largest way.

This is the one where we begin to see other figures. It began to try to come forward again and again in Olson's poetry.

[reads "The Moebius Strip"][11]

And then the fourth. These all proceed a poem of his that's quite well-known: "The Kingfishers." But these are openings, opening poems of the directive.

[reads "The Ring of"][12]

In this account that he gives of Aphrodite, in which she is portrayed in an almost Botticellian way, pink girl and so forth, does come after his reading of "The Venice Poem." When he came West again, his interest in talking at length, and my pointing out that in Hesiod it's quite clear in the Homeric hymns that Aphrodite was the penis, or member, as they say in Loeb at the discretion of the English at the end of the century, the member which Zeus had chopped off of his big daddy and thrown upon the sea. The blood became Nereïds and then Eros and Himeros were the two other parts of what was chopped off. What I want to make here is actually this deep image, the one I mean the one deep in time, with a lot of atavistic elements. He already knew in a poem and came forward in "The Ring Of" with just exactly what later you'll find him saying no one *should* do, no one *should* have anything to do with the Olympian account of the god, especially of Aphrodite. He felt sure he wanted to drive back. And back of that to the Titanic.[13]

Now I'm pretty much going to stay by this proposition of the open-closed projective and the word projective: projectile, percussive, prospective and use this as an open attack on the verse of the period, but also upon closure itself. And interestingly enough, he feels immediately in another part of it that his real drive against the iamb is that it's closed, that you step into it and close it. And that it closes the end of the line. So you want something that will come down heavy and open. It must be open at the end of the measure. And he sees that heavy as a closure.

The first thesis that we have in our M.A. program, Aaron Shurin's on the Projective, makes it quite clear that Olson is hiding from himself and from us, a source of the word "projective."[14] Olson, like Pound and like Williams, found it difficult indeed to admit at all the existence of Whitman. They are filled with dismissals of Whitman. Williams in his old age—Denise Levertov went and read every day to him Whitman and certainly we have a kind of palinode, a last, a graceful admission of Whitman as a possible ancestor. What's interesting here is that these three—who owed a lot indeed to Whitman—intention and everything else—treated him pretty much the way my generation treated T.S. Eliot. I mean, you owed a lot to "The Waste Land" but you put that church mouse in a box and let him wither. I mean, you were careful not to refer [to the poem]. And Olson could be quite mean and felt his malice when he was talking about Whitman. But for those of you who have read Olson, [you know] he also wants to convey the fact that Maximus is the first one. That's important actually in the context of the poem that this has to do with first things. Really there are alarming signs of basic themes that make *Maximus*, the concept of Maximus, charged with that concept of Maximusy have ancestors in both *The Cantos* and *Paterson*. Olson does there often try to obliterate them, try to get them moved off and have the *Maximus* be a first poem.

I'm speaking about a needless part of it because there's one thing absolutely true—Maximus is central for him. I mean, he's standing where it is, and it was the center, and at the end, we have "my world," "my time," and so forth. So there was no contest with any other possible poem. This is the positive position I see of the possessives at the end: *"my* pace," *"my* time." Then there can be many other people, places and times. And the struggle for multiplicity—although it's greatly allowed and admired in Olson—he moves towards it, and he knows the cosmos is not the same as the universe though he's frequently trying to hammer it. I mean, this is one of the tensions in his work all the time: is there more than one place or is there only *the* one place?

Now I'm going to take only the three terms that he brings up there [in "Projective Verse"], polemical terms. I must give one more account of this. When this essay appeared in 1950, James Broughton brought it to me. One of the places where Olson would have heard poetry read aloud was Berkeley. We already had an audience going, which fascinated him. We had an audience of about—I think—an audience of about the size we have today [about 25]. We didn't do it to them every week, but it was sort of seasonal. At least we had an audience, which made us interested in printing, and I have kept that disposition fairly strongly. It also meant that poetry in San Francisco developed so that every time you read there were new elements; and it developed intellectually way out of sorts in a way. I mean, people would come to see what do you now have in a poem, how complex has it grown. It was an arena with a game going on. And the game had to increase. And so the poetry also included an aspect of—a projective aspect—of game rules that the audience began to observe and follow and see what you were going to make of them as you go on.

Myth and history were already very much present in it for me, and what brought Olson to me while I was meeting that man and talking to him about cities and farmers and agriculture in history was that he had read the medieval things and he'd seen a poem with footnotes.[15] It's not my favorite poem. I don't think that I printed it with footnotes finally, but at least that's what Charles was writing in, footnotes. And I thought, gee, if footnotes can be part of the poem, I've got it. Because he didn't want to desert those footnotes. But I think he was sick of writing the essays you wrote for MLA or whatever, and he put the footnotes into it. And footnotes have a real role in the *Maximus* as they come in.

Now the first one has to do with Charles's sense of energy. He had the term "field composition" which I'd seen before and thought about in relation to painting. The gestalt had advanced the "field composition" of painting [so] that intention does not move pointedly around a painting the eye actually rediscovers the painting with different paths. You look at a painting somehow in its entirety. Then the great question came up with the

gestalt: don't we read the same way? Scan the entire area we're reading and then read into it so that we're already in an advanced state of recognition without much time passing at all. But the discovery comes from a field scan of whole areas, and knowing where things go. And then as you read more and more, even before you start, you assume this reading belongs to the field of other readings. And the readers who just don't manage that have real reading difficulties. They have to go from word to word and then re-do the whole area.

Certainly in working I already was assuming that the poem is never read, never finished, so that the first reading is already a complex reading. And even today, if I grasp a poem the first time—by the way. Let's talk about the *mistake*. Exactly what I did with Charles's three poems was assume that I'd read them, and threw them in the waste paper basket. And so it works that the negative is that you can be caught off by saying that you grasp anything right away. There is no field in which it takes place. I really said history is field and what is he doing writing a poem. Yet if he recognizes the poem belonging to the field, the poetry, already everything it does, *does* something to poetry. And that's part of what's going on in the sense of projective—of *himself* doing something to poetry. And then he goes on to the idea of *process*. And we find that the strangest thing that comes then, when it comes to the mind and the dance of the mind, it starts with a syllable. It's *right* at the syllable all the time, and that's where the entire intelligence of the poem is. So you follow through and *it* produces masses of rhymes, masses of disrhyme—rhyming and disrhyming. In that field, you follow what the poem says, begins to say. So elements enter.

Let's go back to the poem where they're projective in a different way because in the poem we have them related to a dream situation. This is why it doesn't turn up, for instance, to be *Kayak* Surrealism in which you think up some really jazzy thing to go with the last thing.[16] An "instanter" doesn't mean that. You have to go instanter because you have to go as quick, quicker. If your mind starts thinking up things it can do with a syllable or a rhyme, you've already lost it. You've got to be going as fast as this thing moves. And Charles is seeing it also in terms of energy, of synapses in a field. The interesting thing is the energy being one of the puzzles in my life. I never knew anybody who had an equal energy to Charles Olson, when he was aroused to the occasion. He was in between inertia and furor. I'm not sure what took place in between. But in furor—I can't imagine. And yet he was constantly calling for energy. One of his true sicknesses in relation to life was that he felt he needed more power or more energy. And so one place where I get a shock when I go back to the projective essay is the major proposition that there's this energy that you have to have in poetry. This must ally with Aaron's picture of the projective.

I'll give you a brief picture of that from Aaron's thesis. In the first place, Aaron Shurin went through Whitman and built a cunning web for the mind

that wants to start saying "oh, no, no, that was mine." And each time you are taking just one more strand and leading on until finally a web has been built of Whitman's actual uses of the word "projection," "projective," and all its families like "ject" and so forth. And in Whitman, the word is surely phallic. It really is. As you catch in the Olson thing here again, the sperm is the primary. And you've got "projectile" right after "projective" in Olson. But there are other ideas of the projective that enter. I would have thought before reading Aaron Shurin's essay that because of Olson's disallowing Whitman and his dislike of *Leaves of Grass*, that he probably hadn't read it very much. But then I keep forgetting that he was an American Studies person, or at least he was in a territory where he had to at least read it to put it down. And I'm convinced that [Whitman is] the real ground—the hidden ground—of the word "projective" as it comes forward—because it's the one place it would have come forward in poetry. And actually, Olson belongs in Whitman's entire line of development as far as the center of the poem and its movement in many ways goes. Let's call Whitman his grandfather. Because then he *can* take another grandfather in its most literal terms and have that Melville. And this would give the swing that one needs because you have got to have the dark vision in Melville to even pick up the dark vision of Whitman and give it substance. It's there throughout Whitman, in Whitman's great desire for completeness, but it does not have the cut that it has in Melville. And in Melville you get a lead that Pound was unacquainted with. A lead to what the interpolated passage of prose, for example, can be. In *Moby-Dick*, you have hunks of other kinds of prose. In *Pierre*, Charles's favorite always was—he did want some part of anything that he wrote to be like the pamphlets that Pierre picks up in the middle of that novel and reads while he's on a stagecoach. And I think those of you who know *Gunslinger* would be aware that is a sort of sassy feedback: *Gunslinger* is right back where Pierre was reading the pamphlet on the stage coach. But that was a paramount view.[17] I mean Pound—you've got such elements. "I'm reading this so it's right here in the poem." And yet Pound has no way of knowing how profoundly American that is. It's good on Pound's part that he doesn't because in every sense Pound needed the isolation. And in a poem that it didn't know how very much it was part of a tradition that actually I think Pound would not have been able to encounter.

The remark I made about Olson, and *could* he read something like Whitman: it's Fielding Dawson who opens that. It's the book on Kline where he says Kline and Olson are the two people he ever knew who could actually be enraged by a book they *couldn't* read. Not that they *couldn't* read but that they *wouldn't* read, no matter what. And frame themselves in relation to it.[18]

There are two other figures, however. Two other meanings of projective that would have come in so strongly for Olson that he himself

would not have thought of this word and its role in Whitman's poetry. So that gets to be the hidden element, for Olson too. One of them is the one in projective geometry and that is already present. It's already present in "The Kingfishers" and it's certainly present in *Maximus* throughout. In projective geometry, my eye will remain steady but I will draw this as it is shown here. In all its turns Cubism has a little to do with this but projective geometry will really move a three-dimensional object into all its dimensions and *that* will be the final description of the three-dimensional object. But Charles Olson's objects were not three-dimensional; they extend in history. His mind extended in history and his objects did. We'll come to the fact that he calls them "projects," but they are also objects and they extend in history. Now we understand why he will find the side that is 2000 B.C. He will find the side that's actually this moment, and like Pound, [he] signed a date on many of the Maximus Poems. In the last book you're aware that Butterick and Boer had to do the job of putting the book into its order, into a chronological order, into it's one after another order, its ordinal order.[19] Charles simply refused to. He had come to the place where he didn't want to type the poems; he didn't want to contact them again, in a sense he didn't want to interfere with them. He'd bring a mass. There's a description that Butterick gave me of his arriving in his car—at the end—and opening the door, out tumbled this array of sheets and Charles said just keep 'em the way they fell; most happily they shouldn't be bound, they should be able to be in any order. He had already come into the place where the ordination in examining a poem we so strongly believe in, he let it open. Remember opening is all right but closing is wrong, so *Maximus* even designed the opening. He rewrote the opening of the poem. I've always wondered if he was imitating, exactly, Pound who after doing six then entirely framed the poem [*The Cantos*] again by rewriting and arranging the material.[20] So many many times in *Maximus* you will find Charles Olson doing the Poundian thing, and the dates are all doing the Poundian thing. But the dates for Pound and the dates for Charles Olson—I think the significance of them is not that they come one after another but they mean *here*. Again they go back to the projective in a geometrical sense. At this time, here, this is the angle [he was] drawing. And the next could be one minute later an account for the turn that you make. Because one thing that had happened that really hit Charles that he couldn't dodge, and it came in on top of this picture of a projective geometry, is puzzling over how far does that proposition of Heisenberg's go?[21] You could find physicists who would drive him up the wall in horror as he would try, it would sound like he had just gotten the most popular idea, indeterminacy. But what the poet knew is that the point at which Heisenberg had found the indeterminacy meant the presence of all of us as an agent, meant the agent was present. And that is very much what's always on his mind when confronted with the *Maximus*. He's both

confronted with the "Maximus" in his self, and at the same time—the Jungian persuasion was very strong—he is already interfering. It can't be a confrontation because it's already substance and self, it's both within himself and larger than self, so he has another kind of indeterminacy. The figure of "my father and my self," the shadow and the photograph and so forth were all about a double language, another term of projection which was going very strong indeed by the time Charles Olson came of intellectual age. Because Freud had already introduced the term of projection, and Charles Olson by the early 1930s, knew of Freudianism, and certainly lots of Jung by 1934, 1935, 1936. I'm just going by when my own life changed, and I'm not sure when the Jungian work, *Modern Man In Search of a Own Soul,* or whatever the title was in those days, came.[22]

But first the Freudian idea of projection. That was that when things are charged with meaning. Remember that Pound had defined that a poem was language charged with meaning to its utmost extent. I realize this concept of the poem is passé today, since linguists have explained to us that you can't possibly charge language with meaning. It has its charge its card, which rings up in some bureau somewhere. The word itself ain't got nothing in its pocket. So we're dealing with a delusion about language that, well, one that I belong to, so no wonder I need a certain humor about it—that Pound really thought he had distinguished something about the poem. And Olson still goes by it. The charged with meaning now for Olson involves the projective, out of Freud. If it's charged with meaning and charged with emotion, then where does the charge come from? Now in my own thought the charge comes from the community of meaning that I see language as being. In other words, I feel myself going over into language: I mean not myself, but as building in language, and language itself has its meanings. And Olson used the *OED* with very much that sense. He had also the magic of the first meaning must be the right one, the one that the projective comes from, and that the project comes from. And so you had to locate the first one, the earliest one, the beginning point, so each word was really thought of as a sperm word. I see I'm dangerously near sperm oil for a man who was looking at *Moby-Dick* most of the time. Puns are going to be impossible here.

Each word has its authenticity, its secrets, its magic at the point of origins, and the point of origins already also in Olson's world, post-Darwinian, really is at an unknown. So now the dangerous turn around of the projective—this was still projective geometry—we see this object and we turn it around, we see this object and we describe it in all its ways, and yet now this same word means that even my doing this is projective on my part. How come you're doing that? That's now seen. In Freudianism that was seen as quite negative; that is, they thought first that negative emotions were projected on the world around. The critical use of the term projective

comes first in Freud's analysis of paranoia. I think that right away Olson would have been involved with that meaning. Think about the rape scene with the elements entranced, with the mind entirely centered on the sound syllable, on the syllable which now is a germinal sound of a multitude of possible words. And it is entranced, so everything that comes from that is in a state of projection. There are some verifications, but on the other hand I do know as a poet if anybody has an interpretation of my poetry and they're happy they've made an extraordinary and intelligent breakthrough but I say, gee, it never occurred to me but isn't it wonderful what readers can make of it, no trouble at all. And there may indeed be these moments for Olson, at a point one of the "Maximuses" is dedicated to "Duncan, who knows what is going on,"[23] which is more than I would have volunteered for. And actually by the way it has hidden in it almost that the poet doesn't know because this is part of Olson's real relation to the poem, not that it would be out of hand but that it must be leading him so he doesn't know. But what he meant at that time was that I had come into print with a question: isn't *Maximus* really a large magic formula or chant trying to change the soul in the world? Doesn't it have that role too? So it becomes like a mantra, as Pound thought the poem also was. That's exactly how Pound saw Dante. And at times in *The Cantos* you find prayers and certain things, and very probably in the most barren areas of *The Cantos*, in every other sense, like the areas where we go through just paragraphs, letters of John Adams, charged with nothing but the rhythm that Pound arranges from the prose itself—that is, where we don't encounter glorious thought of Adams, but the rhythm itself will be present—isn't Pound there trying to infect us with the underlying magic of the age of reason, which he and all other unreasonable men worship. I think he really felt that if he got the rhythm of the prose and the feel of it, which is one of the great realizations of the eighteenth-century, he would have what he needed in a way that he could have only if he didn't encounter the actual thought and moved in that rhythm. You can hear that in Pound when he says that in Jefferson or Mussolini neither one would be the answer for America at this time, but both of them are touchstones of a style or something deeper than style that he believed in. We can now all hear the danger of the sound; there is a corrective. Along with the magic rhythm, he paid a lot of attention to what John Adams was thinking, and to the frameworks of his thought because they aren't divorced from these rhythms. His intuition was quite right: they are a mentally powerful framework, that had *The Cantos* inherited them—yet he had to have just that hubris to get off the picture of *The Cantos*.

In Olson's case the hubris goes back much further than I think Pound ever proposed it to himself, because it swings from this matter of death and begetting. The one that was right there in the beginning, and its hold on the *Maximus* is tremendous. Even if in the beginning it's not entirely

proposed, it's still the flood and so forth. I'll read the opening "Maximus." Then I want to go through a series here to give you a feel of what happens in the one called the third volume.

You have to put on some emphysema to read this. This is rhapsody as it's written. I remember in departments a total misunderstanding of Allen Ginsberg saying "I write by breath"—and it's about ten miles long. You only can talk about "you write by breath" if you only got enough breath to write out of the top couple of [lines]. The two masters, Olson and Zukofsky, it was always in between [gasps]. And yet this is part of the ritual magic. In their case it surpasses smokers smoking for a quick death, which they both did; well Zukofsky was decently in his seventies, but they were really smoking in relation to a kind of magic rite that the poetry came for.

[reads "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You"]

In 1948, just when I began "The Venice Poem," Pound sent out to Olson as well as to myself, and to Creeley, and to a small circle of poets who were corresponding with him, a manifesto. He called it the "Cleaner's Manifesto." He felt it was terrific and would change the whole world, then he shouldn't sign it at all because there he was in St. Elizabeth's and they would find out. The three things in the letter I built into the text of "The Venice Poem."[24] So Charles's coming to know about my poetry was also because in the period when Charles Olson had volunteered to become kind of a secretary for Pound he had read and seen correspondence, my correspondence with Pound, and he wanted to see where all that stuff was coming from.[25]

The three things from Pound were first "to follow the tone leading of vowels," point number two "to watch the consonant clusters," and point number three was "the function of poetry was to debunk by lucidity." There was no explanation. I think any of us who were having any faith at all in Pound knew that if we had to find out what the tone leading the vowels was, think about it and why, that would be a shift instead of talking about rhyming. I thought first that even when you rhyme, when you go straight through the full rhymes, you have not that many words that are generated by the sound that is begun. If you move by the vowel sound itself, now you're not worrying about assonance or consonance. If you move from the vowel sound, suddenly the poem can be intellectual because it has a very wide vocabulary. You can't look up the vowel sounds, but you tune in on all the vowel sounds instead of tuning in on rhymes. You'll still have rhymes, which make very strange sense. That's one of their great advantages, rhymes sometimes make very pointed sense so that you almost feel in the beginning weren't they really grouped together to make these combinations, June and moon and so forth, over-convincing sense, and they also make delightfully ridiculous sense, both in life and poetry. But if you go to the vowel, and Charles Olson starts absolutely to carry that over when he writes the "Projective Verse" two years after that "Manifesto" of

Pound's, [you find] that the mind is centered in the syllable, and the breath is the vowel. But the breath, and it's as ancient a message about poetry as I know, is the reason poetry and the spirit are identical. The breath moves in the vowel, and that's where it really is. And yet today one of the major things, one of the great splits, are the ones who consider that sounds or vowels or rhymes are all devices of the poet, something that you learn that's an art or a craft, and not the spirit. Charles was definitely saying that the presence of breath in the vowel is where it all moves from. And the mind must be obedient to that, not only obedient but already hearing deep into that sound, and then it will be entranced. Elements entranced, and the poem of the entranced mind, is already very much where Olson was moving from.

When I was first corresponding with Zukofsky he wrote back which Pound is it—is it the good Pound or the bad Pound that you follow? And I thought gee, I guess it's the bad Pound because I realize Zukofsky isn't talking about the man who's a Fascist or an anti-Semite at all. I think, knowing my Zukofsky and loving his work as I do, that he's talking about the entranced, enthralled Pound; the fact that Pound listening to the vowel writes in a state of trance. And in relation to Dante's siren I've written, isn't that the false sound of poetry, isn't Dante talking about something like that way over on Zukofsky's side of the question, about just the contrary of where Olson places it, and where Pound is so often enraptured through passages of *The Cantos* that I still love for this rapture. Remember enthralled, raptured, and enchanted, enchanted means to be taken in by the song, but rapture is the same word as rape, and ultimately means to be profoundly violated by the sound. What I'm showing is this very thing in "Projective Verse" is the center it must move from, and the obedience must be in it, is also the most dangerous point of all. [Read] the passage on Dante again about the siren, you'll see it is that element of the music.

Now Dante is close to music but Olson is highly allergic to music. He does have a note that he sides with Boulez against Cage. I know that he had his wars against music. Musick means musak, like it occurs in *Paterson.* I'm thinking about attention in the poem, in which you go into the sound of the vowel as a trust because of the breath, and the music is very high in Olson. It was the only thing that could get me into the poem. That it looked crazy on the page could never do it, and in a passage like this, elements are entranced. There is a tension against it that goes back to the music, and it's this music that breaks the trance. So there's a music that breaks the trance, one that goes forward.

Now dream comes very immediate to this. We're now coming to the aspect of projection that's very double indeed, and that's the one that comes from Charles's lifelong involvement with Jungian thought and then, out of Jungian thought, in the later part of his life it's Corbin's work in translating

the Sufi that entirely involves Charles's thought as it goes toward life and death and again, as the angels appear, in the poem "Angels of the Poem."[26] It isn't death that appears in those last passages of the poem, it is an angel of some passage of a kind. And also Olson in his last years becomes hungry for the sources of poetry itself. There are some very powerful passages of suddenly a baby Olson, almost like figures I remember in a canvas of Rubens, where the children are not just nursing they're tearing at the tits and wildly sucking the substance out of the mother so the whole thing turns into a terrible, violent rape of another kind, the whole canvas has to do with eating and eating becomes this kind of orgiastic rapture, rape of grace. A very shocking canvas indeed, because of the greed. Although Freud shocked the world by speaking of infant sexuality, these figures have been sitting there all the time in Munich—infants that are way out of bounds. Not only are there little sexual monsters but there's a full cannibalistic picture. And the mother is the most unbelievable mixture of gratification, horror and fury, all stirred up in one image.

A bit of this begins to break through in figures of the underworld in Olson. That figure of Our Lady holding now the ship and not the child.[27] When I was teaching at Black Mountain I pointed out to my class that Pound had written a poem containing history with all the gods present except for Yahweh, Our Lady, and Christ. Then I said, and oh yes isn't it interesting that they haven't appeared in *Maximus*. But of course Our Lady had appeared through the poem, and Our Lady really is present, and for all the Jungianism is not mixed up. She is herself when she appears in the poem. But I went to Charles and said but where is the Christ and he said well he's the carpenter. He appears as a character hidden in the development of the poem, the carpenter, the one who was the carpenter of the ship becomes almost hidden, or he may indeed be the place Christ is hiding in the period of the first colony.[28]

In one place in the poem Charles does something that establishes a point of recognition between *Paterson* and this poem. In *Paterson*—remember in the Third Book,[29] the book that has to do with the "divorce" of language—you come to a place where they're drilling to get oil, shale, and so forth, and then go down to level after level after level and it's dry and doesn't yield anything. What you're reading is just the drilling record, but all of it becomes metaphor and again we've got the projective present. In the Freudian projective and then the Jungian one, all built around the first analysis of a case of paranoia, it is not only that the paranoia projects upon the world so that the whole world comes alive with the interior content of the projector. The poet is not just the maker but also the projector. We begin to intrude upon a third kind of projection going on in the twentieth-century which was the movie camera. All the way through the nineteenth-century it had been the magic lantern show which is already

central to Goethe and to many contemplations about the nature of the visible world and the nature of imagination. For Freud already the movie theater is there and the projector, and certainly for the analysands and the people drawn into Freudianism in the beginning of the century, the central experience threatening to wipe out theater was the light projection in which a world appeared. That projector is very close on top of this picture. Now in this projection, with the magic intention, the paranoid also feels the world is projecting on him: that's the paranoid feeling of it. But if we think of the circuit all the way through, the art projects into a world, and in its projection, wherever it really encounters the world, we're again in this projective geometrical figure, as it turns it around, then back from the world streams a transformed world. The world is infected by the projection, and now the world starts to project. We see a Cézanne and for an hour or two we see the world infected with the projection of Cézanne. That's part of what I meant by the magic intention of *Maximus.* The poem which is entranced in its base elements, which are projected and tend to entrance the human world and "its trees, my car, my wife," its trees, or their trees, each one then "my car," so even "my mountain." In the grand dream along this line, the Orphic one of course, the myth says that the poet entrances the trees himself, and the mountains and the rocks and the streams. But certainly art does transform within its own aura: that's one of its danger points and also one of its marvels is to transform for a time, in which it has also entranced us, the way we see, the way we feel, the way the world appears to us in the same system of projection. So this carries projection further. I had one mad moment a day or two ago when I thought, gee, should I read all the way through Jung and see how far he got with this theory of projection? I realized *no.* But somebody running down that someday may really find something. I know in the feel of it that something like this is turning around over and over again that distinguishes the Jungian level from the Freudian level in regard to the term projection. Well the passage here is:

[reads from "The Record"][30]

And so forth. But when you finish the list, if you recite it all the way through, you have the actual conditions of their lives. You have every condition, and you have the elements again, entranced. I dodged reading this whole list, not because it would tire me, that's the first thing you know, but that's the foreground of the whole business of the hypnogogic state. All you have to do is picture yourself in a job in which you're calling out this list of materials, and they've taken over your head by the time you come to the end of it. So the poem has many presentations of this kind. I feel this goes back to Pound, where he goes in the American *Cantos,* where most critics were only saying, gee, this is the dullest stuff I ever read. But many of them had that response to *Ulysses.* At the break point I'll leave you with

the idea that what they were saying was not at all imperceptive, they just weren't driving home to what gave them that very definite feeling. Just beyond this I am getting tired, my eyelids are getting heavy, this is getting tedious, the book takes you over. And the one place it takes people over completely are the stock report pages. I mean they're totally wiped out for the rest of their lives. They open the paper every day, and this whole column does it to them.

I had a job in 1940, or 1941,[31] as a distribution agent for Dell Publishing Company. At that time they put out 52 magazines. A distribution agent is a detective. In Manhattan, Brooklyn, and so forth, you distribute copies of books by putting numbers down for hours and hours and hours, and also, you can use a slide rule. I found out that the only thing that made the job interesting for a little while was that I found I could add four columns without adding one column at a time. And then I'd go home. All I was was a human adding machine. And they call it pushing, it's counterpart for the male push, push, push, takes over completely, and I was going down these columns, just out of my head, and suicide would appear in between as all night long you would be going through this operation.

To get back to the poem, *The Cantos* had moments of this, and actually Olson doesn't plunge into this list, it's a hint, what I see in this is that this part is telling to Olson, and telling about the underlying poetics and bringing us back to it, but of course also he sees that these were the conditions for two years for these people. Every physical thing that they encountered was theirs: all of the things on this bill of lading are the elements and as they're named and counted, and counted again and again, and as they disappear, which is part of the thing which goes on in the poem. They are the very basic experience of being entranced.

[Duncan calls a break in the class.]

I'm going to start in this book by reading a "Stevens Song." "Stevens" is the carpenter, and so I want to talk about another dimension. Given the projective and Charles's own understanding as the projective operating throughout, as the happy paranoid poetic discovery, in the Jungian sense, the world is actually your matter. So that everything that happens belongs to your story is the ultimate paranoid picture. I'll tell for the millionth time the delightful story of Burroughs in London: he was asked "aren't you afraid of your paranoia?" and Burroughs says "well, you know what paranoia is, it's when you know all the facts." And Charles works back and forth in his philosophy, and in his letters he worried the question about what was history and what word could he use back and forth. What became more and more the worry was that again, we've got this term of "my"—a term as I said I also found myself contending with—where Charles actually

opens it up and it becomes a major principle. The world really is my world, and now that is a projective world of how something is going to come in. How is something going to enter from out there once they discovered the other. Then it's your other. The great question is—are you the other's other? And the arrangement is, it's a hard ground.

So in looking in history he knows he's going to find—as certainly Williams did—that all of history has been there to furnish the matter of the very poem he's on. And that as a matter of fact, if a ship has taken the place of Christ, then Christ is hidden in the carpenter who made the ship, and the carpenter will be there, and he uncovers the carpenter who made the ship. The *actual*, and let's use the term *actual* which is very important here. The term real won't tell us anything very important at all, because much of the actual world is not real or realized, and let's say some people have some dreams that are real and some that are not real. We'll leave the term real there. That it actually happened—that you actually had the dream, that you actually saw it in some other places. Charles looks in history for the actual place where the carpenter is in history. Then what is entirely projective here is that he recognizes the carpenter when he finds him. "This is the carpenter" is a projective decision entirely. And the carpenter meanwhile is in an interior schema that Charles in part experiences as archetypes, as Jung proposes them, of the psyche. And there's no trouble with archetypes of the psyche any more than archetypes of the mind, providing we've got a Platonic mind and a Jungian psyche. That would be okay, that works, and we understand in the context. But now we've got a picture that this is a field of poetry that can be entranced and can invent. If it invents, it lets something into it. This is a problem Williams faced in *Paterson*. If you remember, one of the things he begins to realize, there's some problem here about invention which is essential. And in a way if you can see that if in the middle of a projection you can also invent—let something into this schema so that you're composing instead of entirely entranced or enthralled. This acts as a kind of restorative of the proportions and revivification of the areas of the poem.

I think this holds for people looking at these poems and thinking are these collages. Yes, they're in a period of people like collages, like things brought in, but it may very well be because in the pressures of overpopulated cities, with vast populations around us. We do form overly strong schemas. We can't find one we belong to, so we belong to our own and that already has the character of the one Freud was looking at. If we belong to our own pattern, and so do people we know, we know just the way they fit; they belong incidentally to the pattern, and groups. And in a society of that kind, when people are in groups, a Jonestown becomes very true of a group, or the patterns of the splitting up of groups, the Communist

Stalinist and Trotskyite split, and splintering in every level of groups that begin to form any kind of grouping. One of the things that is present in the proposition about closed and open, the beginning one, remember, is just that he doesn't want to die; he does not want the second date to go there at all, and more than that he's saying something quite true. No matter what else, he does not write that second date. No matter how he does it, he does not really get to write that second date. He doesn't close the parentheses. He starts out after the first parenthesis has been opened, the first parentheses is already there.

This was so set in his mind that when I went to attend his dying and came in, in the last session, and said well you're ten years older than I am, and I've always come to see how you do it each time, so I came to see how you would die, Charles.[32] And he said oh I'm not dying, I've got this live-her to attend to. He had cancer of the liver, and also, in Jungian teaching he'd found that the liver was the anima, and he'd written over and over again, trying to make the formula of "live-her," and he was in a deep travail of soul because he had come through to a recognition, but a bewildered one, because nothing else he comes to—it certainly doesn't come in the poem—remember "my wife." I think Betty and Connie may occur in the poem. I thought, will I go madly through and see if they occur as persons, which they certainly were. But now "my wife" is someone else, is really now back in that schema. And in his world women so powerfully belonged to the interior schema, to the paranoid place they took, they sustained him, whatever it was, that they really were. It was certainly clear that Betty felt more and more isolated. That character that we have when women come up and tell, "I was a housewife for twenty years, and when he died I had no identity at all, I didn't know who I was, I wasn't anyone, and now I don't know what to do with the house I used to keep because housekeeping belongs to somebody's schema." This is very powerful in Olson, and so the "live-her" was still interior, and he felt he was still talking about *his* anima, his own feminine character, and at the same time, the hubris was immediate, it certainly could have brought tears to one's eyes. He was in a bewildered grief when Betty in a little car drove straight into a Mack truck, at night drove between the lights of the truck instead of around them.[33] The news couldn't get through.

I'm giving you the tension in which the energy of this poem moves, and there's a declaration in this poem. For those of you who know "Against Wisdom As Such," there's a warning towards me. If you start thinking a certain way then God does rush in.[34] The *Maximus Poems* themselves begin to have credos. "I believe in God" comes into the book very early. As a credo again, it can't go much further off. Let me read this one, in which the carpenter is present as he was found and recognized as being, and we've

then got a hidden Christ, one that you could recognize but no one recognized.

[reads "Steven's Song"][35]

## Notes

1. Robert Duncan delivered this class lecture at New College in San Francisco 17 February 1982. Duncan's method of lecturing was not that of a formal academician. He began talking about a subject and then followed out a line of thought where it took him. In the transcription that follows, I have attempted to make a translation from an oral presentation to a text for reading. Sentences and non-sentences begin and stop without reaching a point. Some of these have been deleted. At times it was necessary to add words to make the lecture accessible as a reading text. These additions have been enclosed in brackets. But I have attempted to give a sense of the activity of Duncan's mind conceiving thought as he talked. In some ways, the generative action of his mind is as substantive as the thought delivered.

   The talk or lecture is entitled "Projective Project: Olson," and is one of a series of lectures Duncan gave on the projective possibility of contemporary poetry. Implicit in his remarks, and also at times explicit (Duncan quotes it) is Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" *Poetry New York*, no. 3 (1950): 13-22. Duncan also makes references to Olson's poems, and these have been noted to later collected editions of Olson's work. © The Literary Estate of Robert Duncan. Transcribed and edited by Robert J. Bertholf.
2. Charles Olson, *Y & X*, with drawings by Corrado Cagli (Washington, D. C.: Black Sun Press, 1948).
3. *My Dinner With André*, screenplay by Wallace Shawn and André Gregory (New York: Grove Press, 1981). The film version was directed by Louis Malle.
4. "The K," now collected in *Collected Poems of Charles Olson Excluding the Maximus Poems*, ed. George Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 14. Hereafter cited as *CP*.
5. William Stanley Merwin's (1927- ) early books *A Mask for Janus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) and *The Dancing of Bears* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) attracted the attention of both Duncan and Olson.
6. The reference here is to the final line of the final *Maximus Poem*: "my life my car my color and myself." *The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 635. Hereafter cited as *MP*.
7. *CP*, 46
8. John Clarke (1933-1992), poet and student of Olson's at SUNY, Buffalo in the 1960s. He and Albert Glover published the pamphlets that made up *The Curriculum of the Soul*. Clarke's contribution to this series is *Blake* (Canton, NY: The Institute of Further Studies, 1973).
9. See Charles Olson, *The Post Office: A Memoir of His Father*, Intro. by George Butterick (Bolinas CA: Grey Fox Press, 1975). Duncan would not have known the poems "Bigman" and "Bigman II" from 1950, which were first published *CP*, 149-154.
10. The reading took place at the San Francisco Museum of Art, ca. 10 February 1957.
11. *CP* 54-55.
12. *CP* 243. The poem was written October 1951, and included in *In Cold Hell, In Thicket*, published as *Origin*, 1st ser., no. 8 (1953).
13. *CP*, 243.
14. Aaron Shurin, "Out of Me: Whitman and the Projective." MA. Thesis, New College of California, 1982.
15. Duncan is referring to his pamphlet, *Medieval Scenes* (San Francisco: Centaur Press, 1950). The poem with footnotes is no doubt a reference to Duncan's "The Venice Poem," which appeared in his book, *Poems 1948-49* (Berkeley: Berkeley Miscellany Editions, 1949). Neither *Medieval Scenes* nor "The Venice Poem" contained footnotes, but the

series does contain an epitaph, and the individual poems do have notes in the manuscripts.

16. George Hitchcock, a poet Duncan knew at Berkeley in 1936-1938, edited and published 62 issues of *Kayak* between 1964 and 1984.
17. Edward Dorn wrote *Gunslinger, Book I* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1968), and *Gunslinger Book II* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969).
18. Fielding Dawson, *An Emotional Memoir of Franz Kline* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).
19. Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems: Volume III*, ed. Charles Boer and George F. Butterick (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975).
20. Ezra Pound published "Three Cantos," *Poetry* 10 (June 1917): 113-121, and then rewrote and rearranged them for the book publication, *A Draft of XVI Cantos* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925).
21. George F. Butterick in *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, no. 3 (Spring 1975) does not list Heisenberg among the authors that Olson read. Duncan read and knew Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (1958; reprinted New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962).
22. C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W.S. Dell and Carl F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1933).
23. One of the Maximus Letters is titled by Olson, "For Robt Duncan,/who understands/ what's going on/—written because of him/ March 17, 1961," *MP* 207-209.
24. The "Cleaner's Manifesto" as sent out by Ezra Pound was published in *Four Pages* no.3 (1948):[3]. Duncan cited it in his "The Venice Poem":

    "We must understand what is happening";
    watch "the duration of syllables
        "the melodic coherence,
        "the tone leading of vowels"
    "The function of poetry is to debunk by lucidity."
25. See Catherine Seelye, ed. *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeth's* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975).
26. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1960; reprinted Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, Inc., 1980.) "Angels of the Poem" was not written by Charles Olson. The precise title and author are unidentified.
27. "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" contains the lines: "(on my Lady of good voyage/ in whose arm, whose left arm rests/ no boy but a carefully carved wood, a painted face, a schooner!/a delicate mast, as bow-sprit for/ forwarding." *MP* 6
28. The opening lines of the "1," "Letter 7," of *The Maximus Poems* are:

    That carpenter is much on my mind
    I think he was the first Maximus.

    Anyhow, he was the first to make things.
    Not just live off nature.

    *MP* 35.
29. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, "Book III, Part III," ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992) 139.
30. Duncan reads the list of provisions. *MP* 121-122.
31. From February through April 1941, Duncan work for Dell Publishing Company in Boston.
32. See Robert Duncan, "Letter to Jess" [after his last visit to Olson in New York Hospital, 1970], *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, no. 1 (1974): 4-6.
33. Betty Olson was killed 28 March 1965 in Wyoming, NY.
34. The reference here is to Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1966).
35. *MP* 399.

# MICHEL DEGUY

## *from* RECUMBENT FIGURES

*(Tr. from the French*
*by Wilson Baldridge)*

### USE COVERED YARD (MARCH)

Neath March's covered yard the plum-tree opens wakeful
At Saint-Germain the buds of Vega
Stroking your lyre to the blossoms' point of epeonivanescence
Architecture is the poem's vow

### CARDIOGRAM (MAY)

The Seine was green by your arm
Further than the Mirabeau bridge beneath
The hills like a breathing
The suburbs praised us
I would have wanted I would have
so needed you to think highly
But the courage now of
a heart like a prisoner furious as a heart
shall drive self-remorse from the lyric!
The lengthening daylight deprived us of days
The ebb of night cuts out our nights
Oh my paradoxical love! We went without poetry

But courage shall be to deprive the poem
of the taste for nothing over the taste for all

## THE NARRATIONS

She would be empty-handed and weary on the Seine bank alas. It was to be the occasion of a descent to my underworld, I spoke to her of Eurydice in the staircase and of Orpheus on the banks of the Seine losing Eurydice as he turned towards her, I turned towards you on this step down to the Seine and lost you, so I will go down more brutally, I will accuse myself, the Underworld's where I would go down, there I'd have made a hell although there would have been nothing but ourselves to look after, even *you* would have got out of there, it no longer would be a common hell but a private one, insulating, and there would have been only my hell, I would have as I turned round lost you to lose you, without believing it; what is it, what was it, what happened, I don't understand—would be Orpheus' phrase, I don't understand what happened, we were getting along well, I was sure of her presence behind me, I turned round she no longer was there, I turned round you were putting on your little sheet-metal cell, the "car," I thought, I hoped you would look my way, because I had gone on ahead by myself, you couldn't have helped but see me, so I was waiting for you in passing to throw me a smile with your fingers, but nothing, not a glance, you had disappeared in your apparition, you were not passing for me, negligent woman you had neglected me, I turned towards you, I saw you comb while driving mindful of your hair alone.

## APHRODITE COLLEAGUE

Modern anadyomene of the rest rooms lovely
Botticellian mid a great flushing noise
centers herself in green door frame arranging blonde
neath electricity her braid her wave
and with a downy sweater's sleeve
tugs on her skirt at the level of the iliac

## PROCESSION

It went from the same to the same, in pure repetition, oscillation from marvel to horror—changing through and through without any difference.

That which, precisely the same, known as repetition without any difference other than numerical, is indistinguishable from the other I will relate in a moment and which is its contradictory perfect, that thing sustained him in being, an object of desire: the ten thousandth stroll through the Bois de Boulogne, this lake, this foliage, this dear bend where the bend disappears; that's it, the same, which despised as being the same once again, it's too much, and empty, unworthy of sustaining repetition, oh infinite weariness, dismisses him from being. He deletes himself—for no other reason than that which recalled him every day when incessant reappearance made repetition desirable. This morning the same changed through and through without anything being changed.

On July 7th, making the most of the colloquium in Albi so as to prefer Albi to the colloquium, I go looking for the banks of the Tarn, and I stray. Attracted by the staggering height, from afar like some

"atomic" factory—but why perched upon?—of the Castelnau dungeon-tower, I cross the bridge a few kilometers downstream and come back along the other bank, guided by this needle balancing the tray of blue sky this morning.

And then on the right, between river and road, a chapel on the sheer bank of the Tarn, surrounded by gravestone crosses pulls me, turns me around, stops me; I get out of the car.

Still necessary that a life's duration be *proportioned* to its nothingness—that to endure be each person's *work*.

Little cemetery by the river, *campo santo* of abandoned tombs; here, I write in my head, may Jacques D. lie forever beneath the cedar.

At his house, alternately and at high frequency, these opposites in a throbbing: his stance of noisy and excessive welcome, of the other, luring the other (loud voice, clear smile, protective gesture . . .), and on the other hand his fleeing, subsiding, dodging, his rejection, of the other, extreme, unjust, scornful or angry: in his tone, his shoulders. . . A principle of irritation at work, now hospitable, now antisocial, and in both cases very quickly laden with disgust at its own occurrences.

The way he died, I can't get over it. Murmurs *I abandon you* in the poppy-strewn wheat, surrounding the rustic and perfect and ruined chapel.

A few weeks ago, though with no other grief than an incurable and general sadness, the same thing happened at Prague's Jewish cemetery, a crowded garret of pages petrified upright, like some antiquarian's gigantic psalter, beneath the crows' pilings.

But was it not you that abandoned us, leaving the bitter bequest of the *notebooks?*

That's the truth: I can't believe it. Truth is also the very thing in which one can not believe, and one cannot believe. I am speaking, of course, about the word of the Gospel, not factual accuracy.

I feel it in my throat! And thinking about my friend the poet who got his name from the stream, and the wound of his death, and the noteworthy way the waters here slip by, and the brother and sister:

> Throat slit, voice therefore seeking my fingers, I
> On the strangled banks of your name's country's river
> Our father lowered into the ground

Carefully laid his wounded throat neath a Cathar cross
Then gone up into the Lévis Tower
Smoother than the pagoda of Harmonies
Here I write in my head
May J D lie
Forever beneath a cedar
*I abandon you* murmurs in the poppy-strewn wheat
Recumbent

An epitaph—within our hearts. May his name not have become mere "intention" on the lips, prayerful, of Arzon's new priest, together with all those buried that morning, when the year revolves on its sepulchral milestones. For here we live with his intention—fulfilled. He opened up places where each season received us

The spring of the indicative
The demographic summer
Winds that return to the homeland
The trepanned moon

Let us forget all grievances, even if we are contemplating their contradiction; let us forget nothing, and raising our eyelids—the upper one, a sky, the lower one, a cliff—let us recognize in these places his *graveyard by the sea.*

## TRANSLATION

You live in Wisconsin.

I never will speak your language. This strange experience of not knowing another language, how to relate it to the world?

What is another language? Your language has taken over the world. The Bengali woman was wise: a language for millions, the question is not to translate it, but that the millions might speak its poem. I do not speak your language.

Will America carry the earth off into its dream, in its Funeral Protection, into its afterlife; or will the earth, tribal, miserable, inexhaustible, restrain it and carry it away, hitched by billions of hands to its geonaut's asbestos suit, toward a "decision" concerning the chaos of famine and blood, or a terrestrial rescue operation about which no one has any "idea". . .

## RECUMBENT FIGURES

I keep losing you since the time in that hotel room
When naked and turned aside you shouted at me get out
I no longer recall our quarrel, my mistake
But the paper, your curved back,
The still life of daylight and the wardrobe,
And my painless belief uprisen I would see you again

everything washes away
the present washes it away
With such force from hour to hour
That from hour to hour there is nothing more
Than the immense Lethe's wave unfurling

## THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

every figure is a figure of thought
A figure is that of the poetry god
Who slips into this figure's form
So alike one can't tell him apart from this host who
[welcomes him
To impregnate Alcmene poetry there

The spirit of poetry: a god-challenger who invokes: "what are you waiting for?!" This length can go on no longer! The interminable must be punctuated; let there be interruption, contour, apparition, finishing! Come. I exhibit Argus's ocellated skin, a coat of synonyms; Proteus, show off that I may recognize you as multiple, let me spell you out at high speed!

The spirit of poetry compares the ogre misleading his children to the "obscure forest" where Dante began by getting lost; it loses "accepted meanings," all that was stated quickly, demanded only to be identified (and no doubt it would be better to be misled by a power than to forestall through play; but after all someone has to begin); business as usual, the obvious, the local envoy, the expected message, it loses patience with them! The genuine deceiver, the man in disguise, comedy's false-hearted rogue, the one the audience has unmasked from the outset is not enough for it. But where is the god?

In tragedies, the god? The one who is other than people think, not through ferociousness but because he cannot be taken in, the excessive one, who would overshadow. Or else there would be two dissemblances, and the first one, pleasant and remediable, to prepare us for the other, "tragic"? The one who is and is not—what he is.

And the gods through the arts taught men to receive, to *be able* to receive, *every thing as a god,* for what it is in being other (in excess, in next-to), other than that which comprises it, in which it comes; in being like what's on its way, that is to say irreducible to what it seems: masked by its appearance, its very true-it-is. The artist learns to make room, by indirect relation, for the "unknown god" in everything. The god is what fills the human form, sometimes too humble like Demeter, in abeyance within the visible, to suggest visibility's inequality to being, the "difference between being and the existent"?

Thus is the test where ever: to recognize the god. It is about that which would surpass life in life, the love god, "promised to all," in any case to you, to you, to you. . . It's your turn. And if you don't welcome him in some way, too bad for you, "you shall have lived in vain."

Even comedy murmurs "it's your business," to recognize him in this valet, this double, this error, this coquette. He is not reserved for the Princes of tragedy; it is not just about dying.

# ELIOT WEINBERGER

## TWO ESSAYS

### MEMORY, KARMA, SMELL

*No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory. . .*

Its brevity illusory:

"Memory," says Plotinus, "is for those who have forgotten." The gods have no memory because they cannot forget. The gods have no memory because they know no time, have no need to fight against time, have no fragments of what has been lost to recollect, to re-collect. In India, with its vast stretches of time, with its same lives appearing and appearing again, there is no distinction between learning and remembering. You knew it in your past lives, you have always known it, to learn is to re-mind yourself, bring yourself back into the mind of universal knowledge. Says the Jaiminiya Upanishad: "It is the unknown that you should remember." And more: It is the unknown that makes you remember, and its trigger is smell, the *vasana*.

*Vasana,* which literally means "scent," is karmic residue, the stuff—as ineffable as a smell—that remains from a past life. Each life produces *vasanas,* which remain dormant until one is reincarnated in the same species. That is, the *vasanas* from your life as a cat will only be triggered when, a hundred incarnations later, you are a cat again.

At their most evident, the *vasanas* are responsible for *déjà vu*. In India, you feel you've been here before because you've been here before. The intangible *vasana* is the bridge between those existences. More subtly, you are passionately attracted to another because of the *vasanas* rising from the other, setting off the memories of your previous love. Every act of love, in India, is a reenactment.

*. . . I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at great depth; I do not know yet what it is but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.*

Great spaces traversed:

Indian erotic poetry is redolent with fragrance. On every page of the great Sanskrit anthology, Vidyakara's *Treasury,* compiled a thousand years ago, lovers inhabit an atmosphere of saffron, sandalwood, human sweat, lotus, mango blossoms, and the flowers for which there are no translations: garlands of *bakula,* pink *bandhuka* blossoms, *ketaka* petals bent by bees. The lovers' mouths are as perfumed as their hair. In Tamil, a language of South India, the same word means "to be united, to wed, to embrace" and "to emit fragrance." Conversely, in the Sanskrit poems, the passion of a lover alone is compared to a flame burning without any smoke.

Western science has shown that certain smells, such as newly mown grass or freshly baked bread, provoke an overwhelming mood of nostalgia—even among those who grew up on city pavements or associate bread with plastic wrappers. As a catayst, smell is primary and mysterious: its chemistry makes us not only remember, but want to remember. It is no coincidence that the most vivid among recent memoirs of childhood have tended to be written by those who were raised in extreme poverty or in rural villages, often in the Third World—places that are sumptuous with smells. Proust himself thinks his voyage begins with the taste and feel on his tongue of the madeleine crumbs in the spoon of tea. He mentions only in passing, barely notices, their conjunction with the fragrant steam rising from the cup.

We in the American middle-class grew up in a world almost entirely devoid of smells, except for that of household cleaning products, and barely remember our childhoods at all, except for the television programs. And worse, Protestantism has given us no neutral word, like "taste," for smell. "Stench" or "fragrance" may be exact, but "odor" or "smell" themselves generally imply a foulness, and "to smell" misleadingly is both transitive and intransitive verb. They pertain to a world whose Satan has a smell, but whose God does not.

And the scientists now say that "the brain has two memory systems, one for ordinary information and one for emotionally charged information." That is, information that occurs under some form of stress, set off by the ancient evolutionary "fight or flight" reaction, is created by the adrenergic hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline, and stored in the amygdala, "a pair of walnut-shaped structures that regulate emotion." The *vasanas,* say

certain commentators, are specifically the memory-traces of powerful desires: among them, the desire for fame or respectability, erotic desire, the desire for knowledge gained from books, spiritual longing. And it is desire, always the need for more, that leads you to be born over and over into this world you crave.

But desire, as it is recognized in India, is also a kind of forgetting. There is a Sanskrit word, *durdhara,* that means both "irresistible" and "difficult to remember." The word is practically a poem itself, but it is made tangible in a lyric by the eighth century poet Vidya, the earliest surviving woman poet in Sanskrit:

> What wealth,
> that you can chatter
> about a night spent
> with your lover—
> the teasings,
> smiles, whispered words—
> even his special fragrance.
> Because O my friends I swear—
> from the moment
> my lover's hand touched my
> skirt, I remember
> nothing at all.
>
> (trans. Andrew Schelling)

The lover, irresistible and difficult to remember. Vidya's friends can remember the fragrance that attracted them to their lovers. But her passion, according to her, was even greater, erasing the traces of the *vasana* that created it. We read her as earthy; in India she would also be metaphysical: the passion of which there is no memory, that comes from no memory, is an act of Tantrism: a release from, an obliteration of, the illusory world.

*But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence the vast structure of recollection.*

The structure of recollection:

# NAKED MOLE-RATS

Naked mole-rats have no fur, but their lips are hairy. Their pinkish mottled skin is loose and hangs in folds, like something that has lost a great deal of weight, the easier to squirm through their narrow tunnels. Incisors protrude from their mouths like pincers, the only feature of their undefined faces. One naked mole-rat can fit across your fingers, its tail dangling down. They have been under the earth for at least three million years.

They never surface. They are blind. Their world is not a labyrinth, but a straight tunnel, a mile or two long, with innumerable cul-de-sacs branching off, and certain larger chambers. They live on the tuberous roots that grow towards them.

As many as three hundred inhabit a colony, moving a ton of dirt every month. They have a caste system, tripartite like the Indian. The smallest among them are the diggers and food-gatherers who work through the night in a line, male and female equally, the first gnawing the earth and kicking it back to the next who kicks it back, until the last, who digs a temporary hole to the surface, kicks out the dirt, its rump exposed to the moon and predators, and then plugs the hole again. When they come across a root, they chew off pieces to carry to the others.

The medium-sized are the warriors, who try to fend off the rufous-beaked snakes, the file snakes, the white-lipped snakes and the sand boas that sometimes find their way in. They attack with repeated tiny bites that are, if the snake is small enough, mysteriously instantly fatal. When, by chance, two colonies of naked mole-rats tunnel into each other, their warriors fight to the death.

These castes serve the largest, who are the breeders. Unique among mammals, only one female reproduces. She is by far the longest and the fattest and the most aggressive in the colony. If she dies there is chaos. She is attended by one to three males, who do nothing else. They spend their time nuzzling her; have sex, initiated by her, by mounting her from behind for fifteen seconds, bracing themselves by holding their front legs against the walls of the tunnel, and mainly failing. When she becomes pregnant, the teats of every colony member, male and female, enlarge, reach their peak at the birth, and then shrink. Just before birth, the female runs wildly through the tunnels.

She has four or five litters a year of a dozen pups. The babies have transparent skin through which their internal organs are clearly visible. Only a few survive, and they live long lives, twenty years or more. The dead babies are eaten, except for their heads. At times the live ones are eaten too.

Interbred so long, they are virtually clones. One dead-end branch of the tunnel is their toilet: they wallow there in the soaked earth so that all

will smell alike. They are nearly always touching each other, rubbing noses, pawing, nuzzling. When their tunnel is blocked they work from both sides and reconnect it perfectly. They sleep in a packed heap in the nesting chamber, with the breeders on the top, staying warm, each naked mole-rat with its nose pressed against the anus and genitals of another.

They are continually cruel in small ways, clanking teeth, breathing rapidly into each other's open mouths, batting, swiping, biting, pulling one another's baggy skin, shoving each other sometimes a yard down the tunnel. But only the females who compete for the role of breeder inflict real harm. Wounded, the defeated female crouches shivering in the toilet, ignored by the others until she dies.

The tunnels are never silent. Naked mole-rats make at least seventeen sounds: soft chirps and loud chirps, high-pitched and low, tooth-grinding, trills, twitters, tongue-taps, sneezes, screams, hisses, grunts. Different sounds for when they bump into each other, when they piss, when they mate, when they're disturbed, alarmed, wounded, when they shove each other, when they meet a foreigner such as a beetle, when they find food, when they can't find food.

They clean their feet with their teeth. They clean their teeth with their feet. They yawn. They shiver. They scratch themselves after they piss. They bask near the surface, in the warm sunless earth. They doze with their short legs splayed, their huge heads drooping. They double over, mouth to anus, to eat their own shit.

They scurry with eyes closed, forwards or backwards at the same speed, over and under each other. They change direction by somersaulting. They find their way, when they don't know it, by darting forward till their nose bumps the wall, dart backwards, adjust the angle, dart forward again. Sometimes a naked mole-rat will suddenly stop, stand on its hind-legs and remain motionless, its head pressed against the roof of the tunnel. Above its head is the civil war in Somalia. Their hearing is acute.

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# PAMELA WYE

## JASON HUNSINGER: EVEN BABIES HAVE BAD DREAMS

All sleepers are unconscious. Sleeping newborns are doubly so. Unformed personalities even when awake, babies are unaware of their being, unable to recognize their arms as their own, or their breathing. Yet their needs are voracious, overwhelming and urgent. Bombarded by sensations, not knowing which way is up, they are cantankerous, strong-willed and helpless. The violence of a screaming baby awakened in the middle of the night by hunger, or gas, or a bad dream is fearsome. What a terrifying time. For everyone. What we come to decipher of inchoate messages, of blind needs and desires, is the sum of our own projections. Our own fears, our own needs. How can it be otherwise when our own adult dreams are comprised of remnants of our infantile desires? So far is this from the sentimentality that envelops images of babyhood in the popular imagination, that sentimentality begins to seem a panicky cover-up for the fearsomeness we feel in the face of infancy.

The sleeper is a captive model. Blank in the way of all captives. As opposed to the model in a traditional portrait, a sleeping infant is doubly devoid of intent or desire to project an appearance. It is here, on a model that embodies incomprehension and the domination of irrational forces, that Jason Hunsinger chose to focus his attention. Hunsinger has drawn his sleeping baby's head as though everything were happening there. As though the dream were the thing. As though the seeing observer and the sleeping baby were one site of consciousness. As though opened eyes were closed and as though drawing hands were tiny clenched fists. How else to know an unknowable dream life? Whether of the drawer or the drawn, the dreaming or the dreamed.

The horizontality of sleepers privileges the head. The body is useless. Verticality is the posture of action. Horizontal, the body is out of the running, parked temporarily. Sleep is a great equalizer. Like old age and death, infancy and sleep produce grimaces, mouths open as though grasping for air or milk. Hunsinger's drawings attest to that grasping, conflating the newborn to the newdead, the suckling with the death mask, each one an instinctual, involuntary grimace, each one an inevitable involuntary state. We choose neither to come nor to go. And we are

helpless, objectified, unfathomable in both instances and equally open to projection by those standing around us. We, the horizontal: the newborn, the newdead, and the sleeping.

Like Egon Schiele's portraits, Hunsinger's heads are arrived at with simple, but painfully blunt lines, rough and smudged. And as Schiele's nudes "shatter the illusion of sex as a romantic or sentimental dream" so too do Hunsinger's sleeping baby heads shatter the collective illusion of infancy as a sentimental dream. Rather, he shows, as though through a transparent skin, the invisible raw impulses of the dream state as synonymous with the physical state of babyhood. His is a portraiture that collects deep inwardness into the sum and substance of outer appearance. The bluntness of Schiele's depictions belie the excruciating refinement of his means. It is to this early 20th century Viennese expressionism that Hunsinger's baby drawings relate. As in Schiele's portraits, the expressive focal point of Hunsinger's babies are the head and hands. Although in the case of Hunsinger, the tense fists are tiny, not long and attenuated as in Schiele, they form a similar visual lexicon. Schiele's interest in the human psyche was playing itself out in the Vienna of Sigmund Freud. Whereas Schiele sliced into the underbelly of Victorian sexuality, Hunsinger takes up the Freudian investigation of infancy and dreamlife, of the observer and the observed, of the parent and the child.

The current artworld's renewed interest in psychoanalytic theory coincides with feminism's claim on infancy and the pre-oedipal stage of early development that privileges the mother-child relationship. Hunsinger, in his baby drawings, re-inserts the father into the formative pre-oedipal period. He reminds us that the father, too, participates in the inarticulate merging of parent and baby that precedes language and through which both parent and baby are changed and effected for life.

Jersey City
January 1995

# JASON HUNSINGER

## SIX DRAWINGS

**Untitled**
*5/5/88, Ink on paper, 15" x 21"*

**Untitled**
*9/29/87, Ink on paper, 10" x 13"*

**Even Babies Have Bad Dreams**
*8/16/89, Ink, pencil on paper, 7" x 10"*

**Untitled**
*1988, Ink on paper, 11" x 10"*

**Untitled**
*1/16/88, Ink on paper, 7" x 10"*

**V**
*1/5/88, Ink on paper, 11" x 15"*

# GUSTAF SOBIN

## ON THE LONGEVITY OF TOPONYMS

I

Nothing's older, in most places, than the toponyms themselves. No, not even the archaic sites they occasionally designate: the ruins, the earthworks, the beheaded remainders, say, of some multi-leveled *oppidum,* lying perched on its long-since abandoned outcrop. *Nomen,* more often than not, antedates *habitatio* itself. It constitutes, indeed, an artifact of its own, a "document," as the scholars would put it. Nothing, in turn, receives more focused attention, not even the potsherds, the stray coin, the scrupulously analyzed cross-sections of the carpoliths: the fossilized fruit of the site's earliest inhabitants. As the founding vocable, the toponym is treated with all the care of an immensely delicate, perfectly irreplacable object.

An object? Can a word, a locution, a breath-shred be endowed with all the properties—the material components—of an object unto itself? Containing everything that might be found, eventually, within its sonorous outlines, can it be considered, indeed, as the object of objects, the "thing" preeminent?

Like the archeologist, the toponymist goes under. Searches, in the present-day place name, for some archaic particle: some linguistic vestige that has somehow managed to survive its lost origins. In a Mediterranean culture such as Provence, those origins are likely to be deeply secreted. Under so many successive layers of French, Provençal and Latin (both medieval and classic), not to mention the "alluvial contributions" of Celtic and—to a lesser extent—Greek and Phoenician, one reaches, occasionally, a deposit—yes, a material deposit—of an otherwise extinct language: Ligurian. Spoken by a people of that very name, indigenous to the present-day provinces of Liguria in northwest Italy and Provence itself in France, their linguistic group has been identified as pre-Indoeuropean. Their language alone, indeed, forms a "substratum," as the toponymists would put it. Like an archeological foundation or base line, it's upon this Ligurian substratum that successive cultures—in successive, toponymical layers—have accumulated as they have. Even if we know virtually nothing about the Ligurian culture itself, we can fairly well assume that certain sounds,

embedded in certain place names (and place names alone), belong to these vanished people. They're all, in fact, that has survived them.

When we refer to particular places, for example, we might find ourselves emitting—as breath particles—the radicals *ar-*, *kar-*, *tar-*, etc. So doing, little do we realize that we're employing, here, the relics of that extinct idiom; perpetuating, in a sense, a lost culture. For out of those very radicals come the toponyms themselves: from *ar-*comes Arles and Orange; from *kar-*, Carry, Cassis and, by extension, Carcassonne; from *tar-*, Tarascon, and so forth. What, in fact, do they signify, these linguistic fragments? As in all archaic languages, they indicate, we learn, some topological feature and most especially either one of rock or water: either, that is, some mountain, ledge or distinct counterfort or, to the contrary, some stream, marshland, estuary. The early toponyms served to distinguish the very landscapes these Bronze Age people inhabited; helped separate—in so many succinct locatives— high ground from low, their own pasture land from that of their neighbors, where they hunted from where they fished. In each instance, the place name indicated some geophysical characteristic, and, by implication, the kind of natural economy inherent therein. The toponym "staked out" a particular area, circumscribing—with a sharp, evocative monosyllable—the material realities of the place itself. Sound, here, anticipated substance; the toponym, its very *topos*.

How can we help but marvel at the work, say, of Bertoldi, tracing the pre-Indoeuropean radical *ganda-* to its very origins, signifying "a rocky terrain as caused by a mountain landslide," or Fouché's study of *kal-* in all its multiple ramifications, indicating—in turn—a rock, a rock shelter, a dwelling, a fortress and, finally, an entire village. In reading the great toponymists, don't we find our own mouth rounding, say, to the beautiful vocable *eoo* meaning—as well it might—a lake, a body of water? The vocable still survives today, in fact, in certain areas of the Pyrenees. In the language of the specialists, it's what is called a "fossilized resonance."

We're not always as fortunate, however. Place names, as Charles Rostaing points out,* have suffered all the vicissitudes of words in general. Subject to wave after wave of successive acculturation, the original toponyms have undergone endless modifications if not—as in most cases—total effacement. As the "object of objects" they were shaped, altered, refashioned to fit the language—and the proclivities—of the dominant culture. Ligurian, for instance, as an indigenous language, became assimilated with Celtic when the Celts invaded southeastern

*Charles Rostaing's study *Les Noms de lieux* (collection *"Que sais-je?"*, Paris, 1972) and his authoritative treatise *Essai sur la Toponymie de la Provence (depuis les origines jusqu'aux invasions barbares)*, (Paris, 1950) have both been indispensable sources of information for the present essay. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to Monsieur Rostaing for both these works.

France in the fifth century B.C. As an amalgamated people, the Celto-Ligurians, in turn, fell under the influence of the Greeks. Along with the potter's wheel, the vine and the olive tree, the Greeks brought with them the written alphabet. They'd affect the Celto-Ligurians by example rather than rule: traces of their immensely sophisticated culture would permeate the interior from the emporia they'd established along the coastline. One after another, place names along their trade routes underwent hellenization. This was followed, in the second century B.C., by the arrival of the Romans: by the Roman *mainmise* over Mediterranean Gaul. No single culture had yet had such a determining effect. Needless to say, the toponym—that most susceptible of vocables—would undergo immense changes in what the Roman colonizers now called "Provincia." Truncating here, agglutinating there, latinizing everywhere, the Romans would shape the name of the place as indelibly as they'd shape the place itself.

The toponym, however, still hadn't found its definitive form. Hadn't—in the language of the toponymists—yet "crystallized." One needs to follow the life of these sonorous objects through the fall of the Roman Empire and the abrupt arrival, at the very same moment, of the Visigoths. Eloquent in its own right, a period of pure stasis ensues. A time of total, cultural sterility. It will be followed (but quietly, slowly, almost subliminally) by a second latinization: that of Christendom itself. Almost exclusively the "property" of ecclesiastics and, most especially, that of its scribes, this second latinization would filter, gradually, into the living idiom. As it did, it would serve to evangelize one place name after another by simply adding a single prefix to the toponym. That prefix, of course, would be *Sanctus*.

Even now, though, these fresh nominals were subject to endless alterations. Having undergone, all too often, the poetic fantasies of those very scribes, mentioned above, they'd find themselves vernacularized—bit by bit—by any number of regional dialects. For instance, a place name such as "Sanctus Amantius" would become—in Provençal—"Sanch Amans." In popular usage (spoken rather than written), the *San* would become isolated and the truncated consonant, *ch*, find itself fused with the following syllable, *amans*, to form "San Chamans."' The commune is now called St.-Chamas in honor of a Saint who would never recognize, today, his own name.

A toponym, at least in Mediterranean Europe, celebrates a series of elisions, adaptations and—quite often—dissimulations rooted in over two thousand years of human history. Organic in its own right, its development is inseparable from all the forces that have contributed to its formation. All the more amazing, then, that a place name might still include—like a pearl on a string of dull syllables—some archaic particle. Some irreducible relic. Surviving a world that no longer exists, that particle calls to mind the rocks,

riverbeds, defensive ledges upon which civilizations were first founded. It calls to mind—in a closing moment—lost origins.

II

Today, anyone arriving in Provence by air will land, most likely, at the Airport of Marseille-Marignane. If a mistral happens to be blowing on that particular day, there's a good chance that the arriving passenger will get a whiff, at least, of the petrol refineries, located five kilometers to the northwest. It serves as a reminder. For even in the midst of Provençal spring with the first orchards of flowering fruit trees visible within only minutes of the airport itself, that dark, acrid odor—blown through the bright air—reminds us of our own, specific moment in history. No, we haven't escaped: not even here.

The refineries themselves surround—virtually suffocate—the little provincial town of Berre. Lying at the edge of a placid, saltwater lake of the very same name, the town was once destined for a happier fate. For salt itself has always been its natural resource. Indeed, Berre meets all the conditions necessary for the exploitation of that indispensable mineral: bright sun, a dry, violent wind, and shallow marshes that contained, at one time, a higher rate of salinity than the Mediterranean itself: 35 grams of salt per liter of water. Along with an abundant quantity of fish, shellfish and crustacea, salt must have attracted Berre's first, protohistoric settlers. A precious element in itself, it became, along with tin, the most highly prized commodity in a barter-based economy. Soon after Caesar's conquest of Gaul, Berre, settled by Roman legionnaires, would evolve along the fringes of the *viae salariae,* the imperial "Salt Routes" that Rome had established clear across the western Mediterranean.

Extracting salt from its marshes and cultivating olive trees in the light soil of its surrounding hillsides, Berre's history, in many ways, resembles that of other towns along the French littoral. Pillaged by the Visigoths at the end of the fifth century, it would suffer through the Dark Ages and resuscitate, gradually, at the outset of the new millennium. As a duchy from the Middle Ages to the Revolution and the *chef-lieu* of its canton ever since, Berre has subsisted—as have most places—off its own, natural wealth and especially that of its salt deposits. Indeed, one tends to forget at the very end of this second millennium, how autonomous most communities once were: how self-sufficing in the economy of their means. In short, how *rooted* they once were to some natural, immediately available, abundantly regenerative, resource. Berre, needless to say, was no exception.

Ever since 1929, however, this history has tended to reverse itself. With the installation of the first petrol refineries in its suburbs and the inexorable

rise of an adjacent petro-chemical complex, the air of this lovely, lake-facing community has literally darkened. Worse, that very same air has grown charged with the micro-organic particles of an uninterrupted pollution. Those who man the valves and maintain the machinery in this complex have become, indeed, its very first victims. Ecologically, culturally, and even economically, the site—invaded by immense capital investment from without—has suffered severe degradation. Today, it's a community that can only watch itself go under. And, in the process, lose its own, innate claim to uniquity. Berre, quite suddenly, could be anywhere in the blighted landscapes of the post-industrial.

Every bit as injurious as the pollution of its atmosphere came that of its waters. A power plant, belonging to the Électricité de France, was installed along the very edge of the Étang de Berre only fifteen kilometers to the west. Shedding so many millions of square meters of fresh water into the saltwater lake, it has virtually destroyed most of the lake's native flora and fauna and driven its rate of salinity down to practically nothing. Only a few years ago, this very same body was rife with flamingos, oyster catchers, avocets. They'd nest among the bulrushes and feed on a plethora of bivalves, mollusks and tiny, scampering crustaceans. Today, none of this natural life has survived. The Étang de Berre lies like a vast, glistening tomb, honoring nothing more than its own memory. Soon, we're told, the fresh water, carrying in its cataract an inordinate amount of silt, will bring the lake—ironically enough—to total desiccation. Yes, soon, these fresh, invasive waters will gag the lake altogether in so much effluvia.

Along with the death of any ecological entity comes that, of course, of the economy it once generated. In the case of the Étang de Berre, this economy—based essentially on the exploitation of its marshes and its abundant marine fauna—has thrived since the early Bronze Age, has existed in a state of biotic equilibrium for nearly three thousand years. This very balance was swept aside in a matter of moments by the signing of a few contracts and the sudden implantation of so many alien industries. These industries, of course, having once exhausted whatever advantages they originally found in the immediate area or having simply depleted its ecology, can always move elsewhere. Berre, to the contrary, can't. Like how many other communities throughout the world, Berre will have to live in the very midst of its own spoliation.

*Berre,* we might hear ourselves uttering. As inveterate dilettantes in the science of toponymy, we find ourselves—often enough—searching for roots: the archaic radicals of given place names, hoping to discover—at the very heart of an appellation—some vague trace of its origins. For "every place name," Rostaing tells us, "has its own signification, even if that signification has long been lost on its very own inhabitants."

*Berre,* in French, evolved out of *Berro* in Provençal. If M. Vincent attributes its origin to *Berra* in Low Latin, meaning "plain" or "valley," Mistral, flirting momentarily with the Semitic radical *beer-*, settles for a more indigenous interpretation: what signifies, in pre-Celtic, "a place situated alongside water." D. Fletcher Valls goes even deeper, though. By drawing on the pre-Indoeuropean substrate, he associates the radical *ber-* with *ibère,* and—by extension—*Iberia:* the land, that is, of the Iberi. These people, it should be noted, were not only contemporary with the Ligurians, but belonged, linguistically speaking, to the very same group: both constituted, indeed, integral parts of what the linguists call a "Mediterranean unity." It's quite possible, Fletcher Valls speculates, that *ber-* evolved into (or out of) *berro,* meaning nothing more nor less, in present-day Spanish, than watercress. A wild variety of that very plant is still to be found—curiously enough—in Berre's very last, surviving marshlands. It goes, needless to say, unpicked.

*Berro, Berra, Berre:* the vocable gets blown out of the darkness of its own, disputed origins. Surviving its very history—the depredations to the very place it designates—it contains, in that sudden monosyllable, the breath of its own inception. The sign-initiate. Even today, spoken more often than not by immigrant workers—Algerians, for the most part, imported as cheap labor in the fifties and suffering today, to a great extent, from massive unemployment—the word, the toponym itself, breaks through an uninterrupted stream of Arabic. Or, in the groping French of a Dutch technician, flown in by Shell Petroleum to solve some obscure disfunction at the refineries, "Berre" rings through so much hesitation, *maladresse,* as his one, unmistakable utterance. Resilient, the toponym has nearly outlived, now, the given figurations of the *topos* itself.

Aren't we always, in a sense, applying the oldest sounds (be they toponyms or not) to our own, most immediate needs? Utilizing, over and over, archaic particles for the sake of some pressing circumstance? Some impending issue? As to the sounds themselves, don't they invariably contain—yes, even at this incalculable distance—the grain, the germ, the invisible seedpod of those incipient cultures that they once determined? We enter our own darkness, today, uttering them. Enter the opacity of our own times, indeed, breathing into sheer air the transparent relics of those lost dawns. Carry them—tinkling like amulets—into whatever future the future still holds.

# MYUNG MI KIM

## HUMMINGBIRD

Name _____

Translate:

1. Praise beasts and their worthy marks.
2. Wear a red scarf while grinding grains.
3. Weave fine hemp cloth and thick hemp cloth.
4. On the eighth day of the third month count your barrels.
5. On the tenth day of the fourth month ward off cuts.
6. Talk is hard to bear and difficult to be rid of.
7. In a shady spot place a well.
8. Keep cranes in the front garden.
9. High places are used as dry fields.
10. Low places are used as rice fields.
11. The fifth day of the ninth month is good for birthing cows.
12. Copying began on the sixth day of the twelfth month.

Fill in the name] [bedraggle

Scat rule of identity

In works] [great learning

Modulation, raising, slackening of the voice

Break in light

Varied] [faculty and expression

Sod] [the first deleted *me* written over

As a tablet would exact

The foregoing citation

As regards the change of a syllable and consequently of the whole word

In this place which we translated *curving and bridling* we can say also *curving and frisking*

Who wrote the word on the page that is the word on the page

Hummingbird brown to match the pinecone it circles

Twelve calls and responses

Convene] [conceal Gourd halved and dried

Both] [clutch a cunning

Assent] [Ditch of culture fed

Edict] [wreak

Stream] [In a beaker

Climb] [people are sleepy and they sleep

Lathe] [sumac Proper noises

Wall and sheep Tell and speak

Immediate] [sensation

Worthless] [came cold on

Command forms] [imperatives Say nothing of poplars

Linger] [living and that creeping is

Hummingbird No word for its size

Copyists are adorned with new pure garments, loose trousers, and a coarse crown

Sprint and flash discharge

Words that cannot be pronounced

Banal] [description or narrative

Authority at each blow

Scant collective days

Octave] [a trace

Known only from a rough drawing

Transmission and ambition scattered to parasites

Suggesting that an engraved plate bearing such letters was]

Pyre] [ardor

Singe] [sound or written sign of the proposition

Hummingbird, there is no speed to match yours

Several sighting holes and multiple plumb-lines

Those who learn by looking at others

Those who learn from written sources

Those who learn by themselves

Meandering neither abject nor low

Vision of the form] [bloody mess of the city

Precisely printing] [warping

Primary fact] [migratory

Conjunction used with abandon is lethargy of the idea

The process, the drawing out, the lapse of time

All these letters including those classed as unnecessary or not genuine are formed by the sound of any voice

O hummingbird, swift trill

Open a page What does it look like

What story what story what sound

Less than nerves in teeth

Title and fervor

Damage in the thousands

Relay] [subject

She was about to wrap the fish in foil

I was working in the storeroom

They could not see around the corner

After that, the smell of milk drying

Testament] [forgotten for furlough

You see, it would have been swept away

Debris scented tops of trees even out and flower

Affirmation's beggarly wasp

Cede] [sorrowed then

Dialogue and function

Rushed to the ferry] [yet there are only so many tenses

Attend] [said arm

Recounting council] [adverbs of time

If I weren't his mother : you are

Act and action drawn from every part

Counterfeit] [motility

All the sound a living house

All the noise a living law

Held and beheld the warble

Each physical and social act committed on the street

Hunger a malfeasance

The book, its fetters

Carbon burn turn straw

Outer suns' pneumatic sleep

Letter, syllable, and word model plurality

Studious need might useful arts explore

Argue: precedents, oaths, public records, witnesses

Deliver: introduction, narration, statement of the case, and peroration

The writing hung on the wall] [whose writing is it

*Meal* means: *stuff, material*

Hummingbird happens as a sound first

Is it clear] [then it is

Heal] [landed parole

Continuous, as of line or time

A perceiver without state

wright's deer vetch

Scarlet pimpernel

filigree

thistle

monkey flower

cow's parsnip

scotch broom

horse chestnut

Hummingbird on lavender

deploring
deponent

scourge
hedge

authority
a horseshoe to a dog's paw

authenticity
eat the whole horse then say the meat stinks

*Place,* such expression as, *in fury*

*Time,* for instance, *yesterday, at evening,* as in *purpose lost*

*State* is, for instance, *having armor on, having shoes on*

*Attitude* is, for instance, *is-lying, is-sitting, wayfarer*

*Activity* is, for example, *burning, cutting*

*Experiment* is each scroll of white pages joined together

# CHARLES STEIN

## TWO POEMS

**Color's being**
in color
rests. And thunder's? In
the ponderous hearts
of local weather gods.

So much for the structure
of Being's categories.

That gods
are denied
by ponderous minds
forfends no thunder's menacing.
Whack! and the oak
is riven in the yard—

Then mind's alert
past Being's thrall.

**Something immutable**
alert through the night

the casual brackets erected about the meaning

the limpid space emergent about the being
sequestered in its bracketing

expanding, extending, compelling through the night
throughout the night

engorging all space with the bright finesse of modality—
its own modality—alone

in the night

when all else is mute in a deep requiescence
returned to the silence of waters
the night quiets

waters that dawn shows in silence and radiant mirror
perfection

the dawn mists rising like spirits from every quarter
return to the sun

And the sounds of the day
arise in the branches
of a thousand awakening arbors

—Something accrues to the night
from within the deepest kernel

the brackets allow

•

Accumulations
split the shore. . .

That which Is and Was

amassed as memory's body

breaks beneath the freight
of the great in-coming

the singular normality and stance
stand no more

complexity of organism
rigor of style
buttressed with uncanny instruments

famed for inaudible functioning
[gifted with glittering emoluments]

the moving parts
that moved with an acute solvency

now accumulate microscopic debits
that sear the intimate munitions—

the micro structures of the great pacificality
appear as war

tugging and struggle—

loud exclamations—then
no further exclamation

desperadoes climb the makeshift

no patriots remain
to attend the failing bulwarks

the kernel of luminosity
distributed at public sale

a wind blows over the night

a shroud falls over the corpus

And yet no last pronunciamento
resolves the episode

There is a budging in the fastnesses of opacity

a murky churning in absence

Something rebounds from the uttermost remotenesses

a quirky elasticity in substance begins to acquit itself

the granularity that ravages
occasions recrudescence once again

weary—the subject
alert in the night

to witness once again
the fevers of appearance

the quivering recrudescence of what seems

# RAJADATTA

*(Tr. from the Pali*
*by Andrew Schelling)*

When Rajadatta the trader was still young, a group of investors staked him to 500 carts of merchandise. He took them to the city of Rajagaha. There he met a beautiful prostitute whose body so intoxicated him he lavished 1,000 rupees a day on her. Before he could shake himself free, he'd squandered the whole caravan and ended up penniless. He took to wandering and one day joined a crowd of laymen who'd gone to hear the Buddha speak. Sitting at the edge of the assembly, he listened with deep concentration. The words rang so true and forcefully in his ears that he joined the assembly of monks that day. And recognizing his weakness for women, he took to a charnel ground to practice austerities.

Meanwhile, another caravan-leader was also spending thousands on the same prostitute. This man wore a lavishly wrought ring on his hand that the woman coveted fiercely. She hired some men to steal it for her. However, the police were tipped off, raided her house, found the wealthy merchant's ring, killed the prostitute on the spot, and flung her body into the charnel ground.

Rajadatta, tramping about in search of a suitably foul object to medicate on, stumbled across her corpse. "This will do," he thought, and began to brood on impermanence. But those parts of the prostitute no dog or jackal had mangled yet distracted him, and with horror he found himself terribly aroused. Aghast at his fantasies he fled to a safe distance. There, sinking deeply into *dhyana*, with a supreme effort of will he achieved insight. This is his poem.

A recluse
went to the burning ground
found a woman's
naked corpse
inside it a tangle of worms
Others blanched

& turned away at the sight
but that poor dead creature's golden
breasts and
unshaved cunt
haunted me until I lost
control & shuddered with
violent urges

Quicker than boiling rice
overflows the pot
I fled the graveyard
fled that poor dead creature
fled until I reached
a safe secluded spot
to sit
& cross my legs &
calm my mind

I considered
the object
considered the hungry ignorant acts
that brought it where it lay
considered the tangle of worms
& corpses
I stared into countless
rounds of suffering
stared into greed & hunger
stared on vanity
stared until desire
blinked like a lamp
and went out
lust no longer assailed me
I made wisdom my own then
yes I accomplished
what had
to be done

# LINH DINH

## FOUR POEMS

### I REFUSE TO BE LAMBASTED BY YOUR BLOATED I CHING

The union goons in their plaid shirts are pouring tar down every orifice not yet plugged up already from their previous campaign the 20 years drought also known as the cork stops here as it does everywhere else for example in all the restaurants I've ever had the gumption to walk in not to eat but to be constipated.

I am a man celebrated in recondite circles for his exquisite stoppages the lips of which have prematurely grown fat from too much exercise why shouldn't one be allowed an occasional stump after decades of hemorrhaging wildly at the drop of a bucket.

Three buckets I have one on each hand and one strapped to the back of my shoulders the exclusive content of which is the ossified stools of my past the weight is preventing me from growing voluptuous like everybody else adorned around the neck with fantastic ulcers the growth of which is considered to be highly decorative in this part of the country.

I refuse to be lambasted by your bloated I Ching that ghastly crossword puzzle appearing at the back of the Times besmeared by gumpats darkened through the centuries.

Nor do I care to place in my mouth a piece of rubber band spat out pre-Christian era from the fatal palate of Genghis Khan although I am quite obviously one of his more illustrious descendants.

The physical properties of the world address themselves to me only insofar as your two pieces of pork fat dangling from the revolutionary gallows about to be erected tomorrow in the public square the gala for which I have two reservations.

The noose of my tie is choking me soon I'll be a decapitated mind permanently hovering over a bucket of piss the stench of which is making me drowsy

My seminal life has been wasted through phony experiences perjured encounters with a blind faggot in a wig and powder my only witness.

The best has been irretrievably lost the years behind an out-of-breath the years ahead an out-of-time a skein unwound a mild distraction don't latch your door I won't latch yours.

I won't latch yours the years behind I won't latch yours the years ahead.

Cirrus cirrostratus cirrocumulus altostratus altocumulus stratocumulus nimbostratus cumulus cumulonimbus stratus are all contained within oversized trousers thatched together with sturdy fibers necessarily bilked.

Futtocks of my dungeon soon I will deck you ascending from Davey's roundhouse toward a friend who will be nice to me.

Note: The cloud sequence is a paraphrase of Vladimir Mayakovski's famous line: "I'm not a man but a cloud in trousers."

Impaled with a pitchfork Vincent Van Gogh.
Handcuffed, trussed, and stuffed Vincent Van Gogh.
Decorated with an oversized medal Vincent Van Gogh.
Within the coffin a chintzy suit Vincent Van Gogh.
Domesticated like a rabid hamster Vincent Van Gogh.
Touched up with expensive cosmetics Vincent Van Gogh.
A less-than-life-size statue walks off its base
every night in the Jardin D'Arles.

## LETTER TO MY BED

Dishevelled bed, sentimental sponge, love of my life,
Witness to all my horrors, my Valdez spills, my crimes,
Black-faced farces, commedia dell'arte—par-deux and solo,
Hopped-up rants, weepy pleas, morning conversations,
Do not spill our confidential beans to enemy intelligence.
They have surrounded us on all sides tonight, bed,
And tomorrow night, and the night after tomorrow night.
You are the leaky boat on the South China Sea fleeing
Ho Chi Minh City; you are the wide gurney of my nightly dearth.

# WANG PING

## SONG OF CALLING SOULS
(The Drowned voices from
the *Golden Venture*)

So here we are
in the evening darkness
of Rose Hill Cemetery
gazing out from our ghosts
like the homeless outside windows.
No moon,
the spring not the spring of the old days.
Our bodies not ours,
but only bodies rotting
in the grave of *laofan*.
We look at the sky
the earth
and the four directions.
The storm gathers in
from all sides.
How shall we pass through this night?

The wind comes blowing.
We six
in deep shadow
stand at the end of time,
stand in the night
that is not just an absence of light,
but a persistent voice,
unsteady and formless,
hum of summer crickets.

Something wants to be said,
even if our words

grasp the air in vain
        and nothing remains.
Our story has set a fact
        beyond fable
Our story
        has no beginning or end.

"Home" we say,
and before we utter the word,
our voices choke with longing:

        The cliff of Fuzhou
                studded with stiff pines.
        The waters of Changle
                shadowed in the sway of bamboo.
        Sea and sky fused.
                Mystic fires along the shore.
        Fishermen's dwellings everywhere

                        How lovely!
                        How familiar!
        When dusk falls,
                faint seagull cries.
        Blue smoke rises
                from red-tiled roofs.
        Small boats offshore
                and fishhawks in silhouette.
        Salty winds
                carrying the murmur of reeds.
        Tide roads of the sea.

The scenes grow in memory,
scenes we lived day by day,
paying no mind:

        Generation after generation,
                nets cast into the lingering light,
                seeds planted in the morning mist.

Fishing kept us out on the waves.
Farming bound our women to the soil.

But at times
we heard a voice, a promise,
a golden dream.
Things seen and heard
turned to confusion.
We pulled our boats onto shore,
left our wives and children
behind the mountain's shadow.

From village to village
we bought and sold
anything at hand
socks underwear suits and dresses gold even drugs
seven days a week
three hundred sixty-five days a year
and not just for the money:
the yearning for adventure
ran deep in our veins.
We played hide-and-seek
with the government and police.
When we got caught and lost all our earnings
we called ourselves "Norman Bethune."
If Mao were still alive
he'd have surely praised us
as he did that Canadian doctor
who gave his life
helping us fight the Japanese ghosts.
We were glad
to help build a "socialist" China
with our illegal gains.
Anyway we had a good laugh
over our losses.

Still, waves of desire
rose daily,

this voice luring
        from the far side of the sea.
Not that we yearned for gold
        or worldly delights,
but this voice
        first muttering
                then roaring in our heads.

So in hope and fear we fared.
        In tears we fared.
Mist spread a veil
        till ocean-bound.
Pinewood mirrored
        in deep green.
At the bottom of the *Golden Venture*
        we did not see our women weeping
        did not hear our children calling.
Only the cry
        "Kari, kari. . ."
of wild geese.

We sailed the ocean
        in the hold of the *Golden Venture*—
                pigs chickens dogs snakes,
        whatever it was they called us.
Our bodies not ours
        sold to the "snakeheads" for the trip.

You ask why we did this?
        Ask the geese why they migrate
                from north to south,
        why the eels swim thousands of miles
                to spawn in the sea.
Tides of desire
        rise for no reason.
So we fared with the faith
                New York had more *fu* than Fuzhou,
                people there enjoyed "perpetual happiness"
                like the name of *Changle*.

So we sailed with the belief
we could buy ourselves back for $30,000
within three years.
Our hard work would bring freedom
to the next generation.
Our sons would be prosperous and happy,
not like us, cursed
by our own country, cursed
by the "old barbarians."
America needed our labor and skills
as much as we needed its dream. . .

And here we are,
hovering around this New Jersey cemetery.
Our bodies gone,
but our blind souls still hanging
like curtains soaked in rain.

Our summer clothes so thin!
So thin our dreams!

Hovering,
that dark night near Rockaway,
our ship finally heaving into sight of New York.
In thirst and hunger we waited.
In fear and hope we waited
to be lifted from the ship's hold
and alight on the land of paradise
"Jump," we'd been told,
"once your feet touch American soil
you'll be free."
In the dark rain we waited.
"Jump," someone shouted,
"the ship is sinking, the police are coming!"
So we jumped
into the night
into the raging sea,
our breasts smothered
by foam and weeds,

our passions tangled,
        the breath beaten from our bodies
by despair and hate.

                Oh, we've sunk so low!
                We've sunk so low!

Only to rise again
        for clinging to wrongful things.
Easy to sink
        in the fire of desire.
Regret comes after the deed.
        Sorrow!
Sorrow stitched into the cloak of our souls.
Our former days now changed,
        leaving no trace.
The distant mountain lies alone.
Shadows of the city so far away.
        Sorrow!
We can speak only in weeping,
memory nothing but white hair on the heart.
Condemned to wander,
lost among the roots of our six senses,
gazing at New York,
gazing homewards,
Fuzhou's mighty waves roiling through the night,
bride in green unveiled in scarlet chamber,
lovers' pillows joined like Siamese twins.
        Who can avoid sorrow in this world?

Our legs lingering
        in the dew-drenched grass
here and there, still clinging.
This deep night,
        is it outside-this-world?
Our women and children
        still awaiting our return.
But here we are,
        nameless,

In life and after life,
apart.
Our song is the crane
calling in her cage
when she thinks of her young
toward nightfall.
Will it reach Fuzhou and Changle
and stir souls from their sleep?
On the boat
we were close,
hundreds of us in the hold
jammed in and in.
Here we live even closer,
six bodies in one hole,
the earth sifting into
our common grave,
unmarked,
no stone erected
then crumbling.
Sands of the shore
may reach an end,
but not our grief.

Home, oh go home!
an empty wave.
Ten thousand voices,
broadcast the pain.
Please, oh please
call our names
Chen Xinhan Zhen Shimin
even if you can't
say them right
Lin Guoshui Chen Dajie
even if you don't know
our origin or age
Wang Xin Huang Changpin
Please, oh please
call us.

Raise our shadows
        from the moss.
Be gentle
        as you call our names.
Do not wake us by force.
        But call us.
Do not let us fade
        from this place,
unlit and unfulfilled.

# EDWARD SCHELB

## "WITNESS CYCLADIC AFRODITA": ALCHEMY AND THE GATEWAY TO THE TOWER

From *Axon Dendron Tree*'s corpse of Agammemnon to the Tower of *Songs I-XXX,* Robert Kelly's alchemical poetry moves through a series of images strung out in memory-wheels or stuck in the hieratic poses of Tarot trumps. His profoundly archetypal vision cannot be reduced to logical categories; his protean and elliptical methods attempt to evade all certainties by alchemical subterfuge. But like Emerson in "The Poet," one can assemble a kind of mythical triumvirate to diagram loosely the nature of Kelly's alchemical work. Instead of Emerson's Knower, Doer, and Sayer, Kelly seems to conceive of the poet as the Thief, the Wanderer, and the Martyr. Each has its own heritage. The Thief recalls the impish play of Hermes the Trickster, the heroic rebellion of Prometheus and the labors of Herakles, Jacob stealing his birthright, John Dillinger with his tommy-gun. The poet's thievery is disruptive—he is the ravager of traditions, overturning received meanings and mocking traditional pieties. The Wanderer is Cain exiled from the garden and Hagar bereft in the desert, the homeless soul of the Gnostic trapped in the material world and crushed by the weight of the heavenly spheres, while the Martyr echoes the sufferings of Christ and the long heritage of Bronze-age sacrificial kings, Odin plucking out his eye for knowledge, the troubadour slain by a glance, Orpheus torn to pieces, Osiris dismembered. And each image is bound to its opposite in eternal tension: the ravager is also the liberator, the scatterer is the destroyer, and the victim is the savior.

From *Axon Dendron Tree* on, Kelly's work becomes increasingly concerned with alchemical themes. His two principal works following *Axon Dendron Tree, Finding the Measure* and *Songs I-XXX,* revolve around alchemical ideas. Particularly in his songs, Kelly's esoteric poetics converge with apocalyptic change and sexual revolution. The unleashing of libidinal energy from genital fixations and the assault upon the phallocratic self, given currency in Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body,* begins to assume increasing importance in Kelly's poetry. The songs fully display the figure of the Martyr, who like Artaud whips his innateness in order to transcend the phallic orders of the body. It is a text of fragments mirroring the *sparagmos* of the Martyr, and its dissociative syntax is the culmination of

Kelly's alchemical *putrefactio*. *Finding the Measure,* his earlier collection, is more often under the sign of the Thief (although Orphic metaphors and gnostic motifs are also present; the avatars of the poet are often indistinguishable). In the prefix to the volume, Kelly argues that "Finding the Measure is finding the mantram" and "finding / the natural articulation of ideas" (3). But far from a Romantic evocation of nature, Kelly's poems seem more high-born cut-purse stealth, Hermes-hot fingers stuffing glittering trinkets into empty pockets. Or, to borrow an image from "An Alchemical Journal," the poems of *Finding the Measure* reside under the sign of the wolf: "under the guise of two wolves, the Body & the Intellect steal the energy of the Heart." Theft is also martyrdom: "Yeheshuah hangs before you on a Roman cross. Crucify the heart" (68).

Hermes' first task is to transgress boundaries. In the "Zodiac Cycle," which seems a kind of memory-wheel presiding over the entire text, Kelly goes out of his way to mix up and mangle discourses—myth, traditional metaphors and lyric conventions are jumbled together with street slang, pornographic revelations, pop-culture icons, Route 66 motels with magic-finger beds, surrealist pizzas, the ouroboros of mutual fellatio sixty-nining into the New Jerusalem, bebop, hieroglyphs, Spinoza. Suck off, jerk off, raccoons raping garbage cans, "cunt's brigantine," "cruising Attica"—the vulgarity of the street merges with the bejeweled rhetoric of tradition with its chrysoprase and votresses of Sheba and dark dioskouri. Clam-eating walruses exist on the same plane as angelic orders. Often his poems in the Zodiac sequence are a stream of seemingly unrelated assertions, quick derringer-like bursts that keep the reader off-balance and deny any sense of orderly progression (The outlaw John Dillinger embodies Charles Williams' mystical way—"the way of the denial of images"). The cycle seems aimed at disrupting habitual responses by allowing previously cordoned-off areas of experience to clash and penetrate. It playfully restores the ancient orders of the night sky: Pisces floats in a motel swimming pool, Scorpio whips its tail on a large pizza, the jug of the Water Bearer is full of oil-filter sludge. And in those astrological highjinks the Trickster challenges the moral certainties of discourse; in "An Alchemical Journal," Kelly in fact parodies the moral earnestness of Pound's Confucian orders and its notion of culture: "Dialect & substandard forms. Popular songs. Old popular ditties. Songs my aunts & uncles knew. Peg o my heart unwobbling pivot. Our Chung?" (58). Hermetic dissolution seeks to shatter hierarchies. The poet, like John Dillinger, attempts to blow up the bank vaults of culture.

The wild excess of the Trickster is similar to the breakdown of metals in alchemy, which prepares the way for the restoration of unity. In a long poem entitled "Jealousy," Kelly inquires into the nature of Hermetic work as a restoration of an unbroken relation to the cosmos. The poem begins

with a vision of the kabbalistic circuits of the *sephiroth* as broken. The sephiroth are emanations of creation in kabbalistic texts which form the structure of the cosmos. They are at once allegorical principles, letters, qualities, nodes of energy conforming to the mystic body. They form the inverted tree—with its branches in heaven and its roots below in Malkuth, the kingdom of material forms. Jewish mysticism seeks to ascend the sephirotic tree to return to the Ayn Sof, the imageless ground of creation. In Kelly's poem, there exists a "gap in the circuit" through which the terrifying riders of Yesod ride. (Yesod is the next to last rung of the ladder of the *sephiroth,* just above *Malkuth,* and corresponds to the genitals). Inevitably gaps recall in Kelly castration, birth traumas, violent separations, the Ginnungagap of *The Loom*—all those psychic divisions that separate the body from nature. Here that gap for Kelly is the outer layer of skin falsely separating inside from outside:

> the Greeks
> made much of *chros,* face of the body's
> joining with the world, membrane of the self
> at the brink of the gap, where the chaos of all
> not integumented with
> the world of order we feel
> from inside out begins. Skin.
>
> (FTM 91)

To restore unity, Kelly suggests, one must submit to violent dispersal and alchemical change, break down the barriers, trash the taboos. He offers a parable of O'Neill of Ulster ("shorn of bone & broken of flesh" [91]), who fashioned a silver hand to rule a kingdom whose king may have no blemish on his skin. The alchemical forging of that hand left "no break in the texture, no gap / for the strong-thighed angels of Yesod" (FTM 92), and the silver hand is a metaphor for the artifice of poetry, which will restore the natural order of things through, paradoxically, the sublimations of alchemy. In "Human Universe," Charles Olson had also written of the skin as not forming a boundary but a continuum: ". . .the proposition here is that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point. The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge" (SW 62). Like the legendary O'Neill, Olson also views his art as the means of restoring unity: "The process of image. . .cannot be understood by separation from the stuff it works on. . . .There is only one thing you can do about kinetic, reenact it. Which is why the man said, he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe" (SW 61). For Kelly, hermetic work similarly proposes to eradicate the boundaries of self and world and enter into the unbroken realm of images, the *alam al-mithal* of Sufism, where the divine Names are

unlocked and returned to their symbolic essence, or the grid of the *sephiroth*, restoring the pure unblemished body of the Adam Kadmon, whose form is the unbroken chain of emanations, establishing links to another order. "The Kabbalah," notes Kelly elsewhere, "reaches its ethical fruition in a here & now world, but a here & now which depends for its very holiness on a man's ability to connect it conceptually or pragmatically with the not-here & not-now" (Vort 139). To uncover the mystic body, argues Kelly, one must abandon the inviolability of the self and the orders of reason—the old patriarchal orders of the sun god in "Jealousy" must be united with the moon-cults of the goddess. A *hierogamos*, the King and Queen in watery embrace.

In the second and third sections of "Jealousy" Kelly meditates upon Hermes the thief. Hermes is a symbol of pure energy extracted from matter and is also an emblem of the unity of opposites; as Jung argues,

> He is the play of colours in the *cauda pavonis* and the division into four elements. He is the hermaphrodite that was in the beginning, that splits into the traditional brother-sister duality and is reunited in the *conjunctio*, to appear once again at the end in the radiant form of the *lumen novam*, the stone. He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught (Qtd. in Grossinger 228).

In Kelly, Hermes is also associated with the moon crater Autolycus. The crater lies between the "Sea of Rainstorms & the Sea of Serenity," which suggests for Kelly the dilemma of the lover caught between pain and pleasure. Hermes is a servant of the Queen, the goddess who dispenses knowledge of love and also the knowledge of loss, and he takes "love for a torment, steals / the pain of love where there is only pleasure" (FTM 93). And through the bestowals of the Queen, objects apparently worthless become treasures, like the philosopher's stone buried in the dunghill. In "Jealousy," the figure of Dante's Beatrice still arises to lead the poet once he has given up the "possessive fear" of his torments and his belief in her as his own creation, for she is "no imago / hatched by your spider self: of her / uniqueness hope one day to taste" (FTM 96). What limits the poet, Kelly implies, is his sense of property, his belief in the false boundary between the self and its world, his metaphysical greed. But the "subtle thief / cures property," asserts Kelly, and Hermes strips away the material husks of spiritual essences:

> The moon steals, Thoth steals
> Hermes your double patron is the lord of thieves,
> on his compassionate face

the smile that lifts rose from the garden,

flower-thief,

murderer of time

(FTM 94)

The Thief is also the liberator, the castrator of Chronus, murderer of time. He is also, oddly enough, the pious Joseph, who relinquishes his identity and submits to mystery. He recognizes that the Virgin is "the name of a / process, an energy moving, not an identity" (FTM 97). As guide or messenger, Hermes is also the *anima* figure. He embodies both the qualities of sulphur and mercury, and he becomes the bridge between worlds: "brick arches of the bridge, / fornex of her legs straddling the world, anima mundi silver on blue" (FTM 98).

The silver of the *anima mundi* represents the stars of the "galaktike, the milk way" (FTM 98), as the universe forms again into the body of the goddess. Alchemy associates silver with the moon. According to Rudolf Hauschka, ". . .we might call silver a dense form of moonlight. It is a substance very like the moon in its reflecting power. . . .Like a true mirror, [the moon] always turns the same side towards us" (86). But the silver stars also refer back to the silver hand of O'Neill and the unbroken circuits of the sephirothic tree. For Kelly the dual forces of *anima* and *animus* form the arch of the bridge—"the *arch* is natural / symbol of all contrary ten- / sions & the order or construct / that resolves them" (FTM 98). The identities of Hermes multiply—there is a fecund confusion of roles and mythological personae in Kelly's alchemy. If the flurry of analogies and emblems thwart logic, so much the better. In Kelly's view, only by succumbing to the snaky slough of identity can splendor be restored, the "splendor / of moon or dawn's light / on men's thick waters" (FTM 98). The hermetic dissolution of stable opposites is only a step in the restoration of splendor; as Edward Kelly writes, "The red male must be digested in union with his white wife, till both become dry—for otherwise no colours will appear. When the dry principle acts on the moist, flowers of all the colours of a Peacock's Tail begin to spring up in the Sage's vessel" (65). Or, in Charles Stein's words, the symbology of the moon is an alchemical *event,* grounded in the physical: "It is like cold water, as if my spine were a tube or column of sensitive material the moon itself poured cold water down, cooling the flesh of my body, drawing me into its moving" (125).

Throughout the long poems of *Finding the Measure,* similar alchemical processes are at work. "ANAGNOSEIS" is a cycle of gnostic poems which explores the metaphors of imprisonment and seeks a way to transcend the archons of the Demiurge. The poet would wind through the labyrinths of the brain, the "tripitaka" of "Diencephalon Cortex Medulla," to the "abyss of the Father" (FTM 113). The serpent goddess would rise up through the

watery tissue and emerge into silence "through Brahma's door" (113). There Kelly takes the path of John Dillinger's denial of images; the rapid metamorphosis of images is meant to burn them away and move to the "utter darkness in the back of the brain where the Images go to die" (Alchemist 82). That interior space Kelly calls the "Elephant's Graveyard," where resides the silence of eternity. "Follow the dying animal, learn the valley where all things perish but ivory," implores Kelly in "An Alchemical Journal," "but ivory gather the ivory" (83). And ivory is what remains after dying away from the world into the silent regions of the brain where images are washed clean and redeemed.[1]

But more characteristic, however, of Kelly's alchemy is "OPVS LEONIS" in which he returns to the erotic images of the Christian alchemical tradition. Kelly employs the symbols of castration and fecundity in a mystical *solificatio*. The phallus, "reborn / upright / in the House of Bread," corresponds to the image of the Savior (FTM 122). Christ the cornerstone is "cock the ashlar, the unmasoned stone" of Masonic mysteries (122), which Kelly symbolically equates with the "upright epsilon / on the epistyle / at Delphi" (123). The image of Christ fulfills the mythological heritage, and the poem becomes a complex series of Christian hermetic transformations revolving around a simple theme: "with this mystery / enter the interior of the earth" (123) and all things will be restored to their splendor. The initiate into this Christian mystery will reign over the "empire / of the simplest signs" (122). For Kelly the dispersals of Hermes and the scattering of Osiris' limbs are ritual acts foreshadowing Christ's Passion, but those ancient rites, wedded to Christian myth, also restore for Kelly the primacy of the goddess to Christian mysteries. As Kelly argues in a poem on Sodom and Gomorra, alchemical workings arise from the goddess:

> For the nature
> of wisdom is as woman & as water flows
> fills the crannies of earth,
> finds its level, finds its place in me, soaking
> the dry grain
> from which moisture mould or sprouting, as it happens.
> (FTM 23)

*Finding the Measure* seeks ultimately to nourish those gnostic seeds through the fecundity of the Goddess. In "Jealousy," Kelly tells the story of how Dante like a packrat would make off with the trinkets of his friends and how at his death his house was piled high with "worthless bright things." "But flotsam & jetsam are the queen's / by law," maintains Kelly, and through her bestowals of grace, those objects also belong to "the

queen's poet" (FTM 93). Hermes' thievery redeems the fragments of the world.

The alchemy of *Finding the Measure* is quickly surpassed by the complexity and brilliance of *Songs I-XXX*. Next to *The Loom*, Kelly's songs form his most extended alchemical text. The martyrdom of Giordano Bruno is its central alchemical motif. In their quicksilver progression of images, the poems mimic the flickering tongues of alchemical flame—images are burnt at the altar and become nearly a wall of fire in their incandescence. Kelly merges martyrdom with the dance, as if the twitch of flesh on its pyre hovers beyond each ecstatic whirl and turn. Dance and martyrdom are each metaphors for the incarnation of meaning; and Kelly's Christian alchemy hearkens back to the "Rosy+Cross." As Jed Rasula has argued of Kelly's work, ". . .Mystery is at the heart of it, the mysterium tremendum of sanctity and grace, the burden on man of making love salvation" (149). Kelly equates the alchemical transmutation of events to Christ's clearing the temple of money-changers, a cleansing that restores the primacy of love untainted by worldly commerce. As N.O. Brown cried out, the poet's task is "To redeem words out of the marketplace, out of the barking, into the silence; instead of commodities, symbols" (Love's Body 258). But *Songs I-XXX* are also a satyr's romp and a tantrist's shower of withheld semen—the way to spirit is through the flesh, and Kelly's alchemy would probe each and every orifice as a door and gate of transcendence, seeking a way out of Oedipal blind alleys.

To transcend Oedipal desire, the unity of self and its corresponding body-image must undergo a form of alchemical dissolution; the body itself becomes the *lapis*. The unity which precedes the formation of the rigid, genitalized self—the amorphous and multiphasic world of fluid exchange before the erection of psychic boundaries—can be restored through the progressive shattering of borders and divisions in a world of fragments and body parts and commingling organs. Kelly envisions a carnal New Jerusalem. His prophecy resides in the configurations of the body—"every orifice is a sybil's cave / in which informations from an alien order whisper" (Songs 74). If the artificial boundaries of the self—with its body marked by prohibitions and tattooed by guilt—can be overcome in the breaking of phallic language, erotic play would be restored. "Every hole / is Delphi," sings Kelly in one of his most ecstatic and horny moments, "each mouth takes in the sun, every / cunt gives birth to sunlight in the dark, messiah / snowheaded, blue eyes of ice" (Songs 74). Identity would be dispersed in a refusal of sublimation, and once more the paths to the universe of prophecy would be cleared.

Kelly's messianic sex might be called the priesthood of all fornicators, and, indeed, there is something disturbing about his paeans to Gnostic orality—its mystic cunnilingus and transcendent fellatio—that sees mutual

pleasure as a mystic ouroboros, the alchemical snake swallowing its own tail. In a nearly emblematic poem in *Finding the Measure,* Kelly tells of ancient Irish masons who—in a craftsman's rite—carved a vulva into the cornice stone and turned the church, or *Kell,* into a woman. Typically you find Kelly crafting icons of sexuality: getting sucked off in the kitchen and dreaming of tubas; coaxing an erection in roadside motels; hanging out with Catullus, the buggers of Sodom, and Pythagorean sex-pots; imagining himself a hummingbird in Kleopatra's bush; sniffing Beatrice's rose and straddling the *anima mundi;* ejaculating as a priest of Mithras; and jerking off in tribute to William Blake.[2] And all those crowing cocks and altars and milky breasts—it's enough to exhaust Krishna or make Don Giovanni slump in the saddle. Kelly jostles and milks the endless row of snakes in the carnal hieroglyphs of Ramses' tomb. Always for Kelly transcendence is found between the sheets; the transfigured body has carpet burns on its knees, raspberries from friction on the kitchen linoleum. The poet constantly fits his prick to the cornice stone.

Yet *Songs I-XXX,* despite its erotic, liberatory intentions, appears to be a troubled recapitulation of Oedipal anxieties—Kelly's attempt to transcend the limitations of genital sexuality serve only to restore its efficacy (indeed, the figure of Bruno may be seen as almost a transcendent phallus governing these songs). His songs show the limits of his alchemical method; they trumpet the internal dilemmas and resistances that resound throughout his entire alchemical corpus.

These songs are Kelly's experiment with what he calls the "extended lyric," and are "parts of a continuous process of finding each day's song . . ." (Songs 101). Each song moves with a kind of associational logic, as image begets image, and each possesses a surface of rapid and enigmatic transitions. Like the root system of plants, the images entwine; nodal points break off into branches that in turn couple with other points, establishing a vast dendritic network of correspondences similar to *Axon Dendron Tree.* Or, to shift metaphors, they can be seen as a series of isolated notes and disjunct melodic passages which obscures the underlying structure, much like tone-row compositions in music (in fact, Kelly cites Schoenberg's unfinished opera Moses and Aaron, perhaps identifying his debt to the composer's dissonant surfaces). A number of historical and mythical figures appear throughout the songs—Kung FuTse, Bruno, Thoth, and Biblical types from Moses to Christ—while certain themes provide a *basso continua* to the whole: the dance, the destruction of images, the nature of money, and many others. Their presentation is sporadic, incomplete, and suggestive in ways similar to, say, a Rauschenberg collage, as the poems reduce history into an elaboration of the present moment. Vast systems of knowledge and historical epoch intertwine; as in Pound's *Cantos,* all ages become contemporaneous.

In the course of the songs, Kelly embodies a poetics which considers fragmentation the true poetic measure. Nietzsche's god of grammar is rejected in favor of the paradoxical clarity of broken syntax. Kelly assaults the sentence, which he sees as mirroring a certain ontology in its form: "Nothing / clearer than fragment. / No syntax / less than all" (9). For Kelly the stability of representation—the illusion of permanence fostered by language—is the central object of alchemical dissolution. In "Song XVIII," for example, Kelly explicitly links Bruno with alchemy; his martyrdom is a fiery cleansing of words, stripping them of their literality:

> . . .root with no stem or stalk or flower .
> dissolve & find the words,
> the word's fix . "Thrown on the wall of the mind"
> Bruno's shadows of ideas, one picture
> to seize the world . in flames
> the years ago . solve the world . he said . to the crucifix
> *I will not look upon that image . the fire shapes my eyes*
>
> (Songs 57)

The principle of alchemical destruction had long been established in the songs. Bruno joins Moses, whose "pure / Lack of word" opposes the "tablet / of specific laws" as a destroyer of images, and the "rune-makers," who assert the play of images outside truth and know "words / could come before things & give comfort" (Songs 18), as a liberator of images from the natural order. For Kelly the soul seeks its essence in the sword or the *labrys,* the two-headed axe of the labyrinth, severing image from context.

For Kelly such alchemical destruction recalls the dance of Shiva and its dual nature: *tandava,* the powerful rush of violent energy, and *lasya,* the soft and lyrical expression of tenderness.[3] *Tandava* accords with the dance of fire that burns itself up in its execution, leaving nothing but a residue of silence; it is a dance that points to the void in its consummation; *"I burn the shadows / of the dancers, from Sinai I deny / the pattern of the dance, / art of the dancer.* What's left when the dance / is danced away" (Songs 20). *Tandava* is the dance of Williams' path of the death of images, while *lasya* arises from delight and forms the weave of the imagination:

> For man dances maid & the dance
> has nothing to do with it, nothing to do,
> is the consequence of their delight & not its cause
> . . . . . .
> Make
> bodies of flesh, rub the fur of the velvet

back & forth in the light,
feel the light
as power of the cloth to yield or capture
(Songs 13)

Like the bellows of the alchemical forge. Kelly's songs alternate between these two rhythms of the dance: the contractive and the expansive. In terms of Kelly's mythology, his songs move to the rhythms of the "anguished journeymen / who have no masters" (Songs 42), who conform to the arc of the sun and unite with the earth showered by the sun's divinity. An alchemical dance beyond nature and the certitudes of meaning:

Behind any light there is light behind any color there is light .
a dance. . .
of being mountains &
valleys . being earth & being each
thing that is on
[the earth & being
vulnerable as earth .
Ode
in the measure of the
[Eye of Horus
which is the resting place of those who do not rest
& the sun
struck on the flint of the horizon)
(Songs 43-44)

This song "in the mode of ♀" imagines a poetry of immediacy unencumbered by tradition, not haunted by ancestral voices. Like Thoreau, Kelly would anticipate morning herself and let the scales of history fall from his eyes.

Yet Kelly's poetry of wandering does not escape from the tyranny of the *logos,* but embodies it. Not yet embracing Hagar at her "altar of alkali," he seeks the inheritance of the father in the plenitude of light. He would assume the nakedness of Adam in the garden beyond the covenants of the patriarchs or, like the angel Enoch of kabbalistic lore, he would become one with God himself. Again the ancient struggle of Oedipus with paternity arises. The deeper the poet moves into the unconscious realm of images the more tenaciously governs the phallus.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of Oedipal struggle is the twenty-first song, which is a meditation on the Fort Hill watchtower in

Roxbury, Massachusetts. The song reenacts primal scenes that arise in the syntactical breaks and slippages of dream-associations. Its surface is fractured—the central images of the fortress and tower are like palimpsests or mythic ciphers and Tarot trumps, and undergo a series of metamorphoses that indicate they serve only as a screen upon which to project fantasy images. Kelly's fantasy has many levels; the poem's opening lines recall the timidity of the prophet before God's injunction, as if the poet stood like a reluctant Joshua before the gates of Jericho, and also the poet's burden of creation in the primal scene of instruction. In the coalescing dream-associations, the carnal act merges with the spiritual psalm, organ-gobbling with the apostolic voice:

> Not ready lord not ready . I cant get started . blow sweet out.
> futter has a sound like an animal doing it . a church
> of the brothers & the sisters,
>
> also amen . at Roxbury
> (Songs 67)

For Kelly anterior images haunt the visual scene; the blow of inspiration recalls the coitus of beasts. As Kelly enters the imaginary realm of Eros, he finds—at the very origin of creation—the shadow of a more primary act.

In Kelly's song the imaginative space of the poem is eroticized. In an early song, he had already revealed his belief in the essentially sexual nature of space. Behind one's orientation to earth and sky lies a woman's body. All motion is sexual motion; all sojourns are pricking on the plain:

> . . .in crystal
> the recensions of space
> I see the queen . in the tower
> that is her body .
> map the intricate subways of her city
> chambers hidden below the rails. . .
>
> (Songs 23)

Words charting the space of dreams are to Kelly a substitute for the primacy of the mother's body. They attempt to symbolically restore a unity with the mother by exploring the labyrinth of her womb. As in Freud, dreams for Kelly symbolically reenact primal incest, returning to unity and quiescence in the manifestation of the desire for death.

Dreaming is also the hallucinating of organs—actors upon the dream stage become *phalloi* in the mother's womb, and the dream process is governed by the laws of castration. "Every coitus repeats the fall," argued N.O. Brown in his analysis of genital sexuality's ambivalence, "brings

death, birth, into the world. It is Sky descending into Mother Earth, ejaculating his powers, suffering castration. The staff that cleaves the water is the dead man's body, the corpse; the stiff that ejaculates the soul or semen is the penis. Penis or corpse, stiff as stone; a perfect erection or monument" (Love's Body 48). While a Jungian view of Kelly's twenty-first song might see the Roxbury tower as a mandala image—the city, body, and cosmos turning and turning about its axis—the tower is unmistakably an image of coitus: "it was the 18th trump / that conduit to such down starfire & bed in / earth, menstrum / fire and aer, i.e., / a green-eyed tower, mother moon" (Songs 67). Again the merger of *anima* and *animus*—the tower made feminine—too literally follows Oedipal logic to warrant any idealizations; in Freudian theory, the child, desiring the mother, yet forbidden her, enacts an imaginary coitus. The phallic image, transfixing the mind, is a sign of the primal scene—the self splits, becoming observer, father and mother, receptacle and substance, vagina and penis in the primary dream of "self as embryo in womb = penis in womb = parents in coitus, the primal scene" (Love's Body 57). Desire de-realizes the present and affirms the stranglehold of the past. Events are shadowed—*scotomized*—upon the stage of dreams.[4]

In his attempt to transcend Oedipal logic, Kelly conflates the mother and the phallus, seeking to transcend the crippling duality of gender:

> phallos & woman & seeks
> her own . (shining!) . witness [. . .]
> witness cycladic Afrodita,
> [under form of an
> unhewn stone, up-pronging, jagged,
> or Hermes' oldest hallows:
> column or quern, herm, that is
> Hermaphrodite means
> Hermes is Venus
>
> (Songs 68)

In alchemical texts, the Hermaphrodite is often central, representing a reconciliation of opposites in the restoration of unity. The hermaphroditic body symbolizes balance, exchange, a harmony of opposites. For N.O. Brown, however, it is merely the hallucinatory false unity in the violent oscillation of Oedipal logic; it attempts to "square the circle; the desire and pursuit of the whole in the form of dual unity or the combined object; the Satanic hermaphroditism of Antichrist. . ." (Love's Body 71). The alchemical squaring of the circle so integral to Jung's alchemy becomes merely a process by which the dreamer assumes both sexual positions: the father as phallus, achieving symbolic gratification of incestual desire, and the mother

as *vagina dentata,* severing the phallus in bloody copulation. The primal scene for Brown is the battle for the symbolic possession of the phallus, a bloody battleground upon which the spoils of authority are won.

In the logic of Kelly's poem, the phallus is precisely what is denied; the tower becomes a symbol of repression and prohibition. The gateway to the tower is seen as an "old iron door bolted shut, / spikes driven in the masonry to hold it closed" (Songs 69). Can one read this not only as a denial of access to the mother, but as denial of access to poetic authority, to the mastery of the father's voice? Firmly in place is the logic of castration and rebellion. Kelly establishes a mythopoetic correspondence between himself and the Egyptian god Set, dismemberer of Osiris, as well as adopting the persona of the knight wandering the plain in search of the Grail. The land is laid waste, and a ritual sacrifice is necessary to restore the land's fertility. Kelly's divided symbolic response first envisions a return to the plenitude of light and Adamic power:

> this is the point of likening, this is the world
> inside the mirror that is the mirror, the world that is the world
> but the say . of moving there . where . the light
> chooses to begin
>
> (Songs 69)

But along with this return to originary light, Kelly also flees from judgment, celebrating Cain's expulsion. And flight corresponds, I imagine, to Kelly's kabbalistic belief in the primacy of words over substance, *muthos* over *logos,* the desert over the garden:

> but the say . of moving
> is gold wire . the code spun spirals of . gold wire
> with Saturn's song . mark of Cain. . .
> fix . settle here to flee . everywhere, wander,
> shunted along the genetic warp . fix . cut loose, an identity
> thought the sun a lance . it is the gold heart of the target
>
> (Songs 70)

But even here rules Saturn, castrator of Chronos, while the origin of light remains a phallic lance. The alchemist's gold is not only the product of mercurial dissolution, but is also an image of castration—the gold plaits, the genetic warp and woof, the snaky hair of Medusa.[5] The tower becomes as well the stone phallus, frozen from the phallic mother's gaze. And in the logic of Kelly's song Medusa devours. The Egypt of Thoth and Hermes Trismegistus becomes the Egypt of Set governed by laws of castration:

& all of us killers, The
city defended from this prospect .
Black Egypt .
sisters who have one between you
mouth . mouth .
(this is classicism, rift in the aither,
ether riff
blow old white song)
in your mouth, one part between you
[all. . .
(Songs 70)

As befitting dream-work, the passage is highly overdetermined—black refers to the populace wandering the grounds, but also to Jung, who (unfortunately) saw the presence of blacks in dreams as indicating historical repression, as well as the alchemical idea of the *putrefactio*, while white is both spiritual purity and the spurting semen of ejaculation. Though the fortress soon becomes a sacred *temenos*, mirroring the "great Ocean" wound in a circle like the snake swallowing its own tail, the nodal point of the passage is the yawning mouth. Devour or be devoured, Kelly seems to imply. No trumpets of prophecy, but the old white song fellatio and the primal scene. "In corporation (introjection), seen with the inward eye, is always eating or swallowing," Brown argues. "In the primal scene a regression takes place. . .and copulation is seen as oral copulation" (Love's Body 70). In "Song XXIV," Kelly makes the equation of vagina, dream and devouring mouth even more baldly in a tapestry woven of genital nightmares: "hunters spot the electric stag but shoot into their own mouths. / we live / any dream to the end . it is a tongue we march on . lose footing up the slimy groove . double arched mouth / the Swallower / is patient" (81). Women become destructive, demonic figures in "Hieronymus' dream" where the "veins of marble turn to living serpents in the urn, hissed / the secret name of his fascinations" (82). The fascination and repulsion of the primal scene doom Kelly to the "Rocky Law of Condemnation and double Generation and Death; which makes the Loins the place of the Last Judgment" (Love's Body 49).

The rest of Kelly's twenty-first song revolves around the battlements—as Shakti dances, forming the healing "circulus mundi" with the genetic code "unraveling in her hands," and Seth's hot breath blows in from offshore (72). The poem finally ends as divided as it began. The world diminishes in strife, becoming convoluted and suffocating. In a moment of clarity born of desperation, Kelly recognizes his failure and the illusory nature of his union:

Lord Aither do you hear me,
we are not animals doing it,
. . . . . .
it was to come to a point
genital organization, or by
[gender,
or by . the generations .
it was to come to a tower .
[above the whole
world . where the enemy troops my brothers were on the
[move
against my brethren

(73)

His prayer points forward to the Civil War of *The Common Shore,* his fevered attempt to bring about symbolically the mystical body of Christ and heal the rifts caused by genital organization. But in the context of his alchemy, his songs demonstrate the flaw of his poetics—the violence of alchemy promises transcendence, but that promise falters in the numbing repetition of violence. Isolated acts of the Magi only restore the roots of sickness. Fragmentary disassociations of dream-work only reveal the tenacity of phallic power. Eros weaves illusions as surely as Vishnu. The flames of the alchemical fire can be a martyr's flames, the Mage's robes a coat of Nessus.

## Notes

1 In his *Vort* interview Kelly gave the following explanation of the Elephant's Graveyard:

> If I were allowed an "is," I would say that form simply is consciousness. There is no distinguishing. Form is consciousness. That of which we are aware is form, is our form. That, the last, quotation of the ones you read, the one from "Unless I know the day," there's a dialectic, I mean two voices speaking there: find it out there, find it behind your eyes, the "your" comes in as a voice speaking to me, then four inches back of *my* eyes, i.e., the occipital region of the brain that is so mysterious, the back part of the head. At that time I was thinking of a physiological model rather than something more "spiritual." But thinking of a physiological level of the old brain and the empty spaces—those parts of the brain back here that don't answer when the electro-encephalograph knocks, when they put the electrodes all over the head and certain areas are full of activity and all kinds of waves are emitted in different states and conditions, and then there are other areas which are silent. And I connect those silent areas no doubt by a simple or Wizard-of-Oz-like mythology with what's going to be or what we're going to learn how to do. But I also perhaps even more deeply connect it with the land in which things die, the elephant's graveyard, which I once had a deep intuition of, that here is a place in us in which the images die, in which they mount up and falter to the back, almost literally going over the pons, over the bridge in the brain, back into the back & die, die there the images die. And our obsessions die there too, the hundreds of thousands of perceptions that we have every minute go there & become washed clean, and some few

of them become redeemed along the way. (135)

2 In *The Convections,* Kelly writes that Blake's Satanic Mills meant "mythologies, and ahrimanic lathing cogwheels for the heart" (64). Kelly often grapples with Blake—his presence is profound in *Axon Dendron Tree;* he's invoked at crucial junctures in *The Mill of Particulars* and *The Loom;* and "The Hand" is a long masturbatory Blakean exchange (See "Injune," Alchemist 151-159). There are also numerous other references to Blake throughout Kelly's corpus.

3 For an extended analysis of this distinction, see Heinrich Zimmer, *Indische Mythen und Symbole: Vishnu, Shiva und das Rad der Wiedergeburten,* München: Eugene Diedrichs Verlag, 1991, 168-194.

4 In *Love's Body,* Norman O. Brown writes: "Psychoanalysis ends in the recognition of the reality principle as Lucifer, the prince of darkness, the prince of this world. The reality-principle is the prince of darkness, its function is to *scotomize,* to spread darkness, walls of separation and concealment." (150).

5 I offer you Norman O. Brown's summary of castration imagery: "To be the penis of the mother with a penis; both erection and castration. The primal scene seen is Medusa's head seen: a trophy, decapitated, and still potent, the female genitals with no penis, but snakes for hair" *(Love's Body,* 65-66). Brown goes on to describe further symbolic resonances: *"Hyphen, hymen, hymn, hypnos.* The net or nexus. Networks of affiliation: the filial relation is not natural but artificial, threaded *(filum)"* (74).

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# OSVALDO SANCHEZ

## IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

*(Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen)*

The knife splits the air in the parched afternoon. Its glint barely takes the measure of the upturned body's pure whiteness. Then a death howl. And the spurt of blood broken off in the silken incision. A salty void between ashen hills. Upright, the body refuses to die. Drenched with red, it clings to its howl, floats over young shoulders tattooed with blood.

The blood, so liquid, runs in fine streams into the basins. All the blood burning in this chalice of fire. Its seething gleam burns the grass in the shadow of the leaden clouds. The one who raises the knife stays focused in the perfect fissure of the gushing wound. The one who holds the victim smiles with the opened loins.

And in the presence of those idols, they open them alive through the breasts and they take out the heart and the entrails. *The precious water of sacrifices.* The heavenly god of water receives *the matchless gleam of blood.* And before dying, dazed by the blows, the victim's throat was cut as if they were slaughtering a lamb. . . *It is the community's equilibrium they seek to restore.*

*The potency of sacrifice lies in the spectacle of physical annihilation, in the abjectness of its criminal fascination.* The priest, a butcher, rolled up his sleeves and, as they were presented to him one by one, methodically put the animals to death. *Then Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*

From this side it already smells of blood. Even this far from the strip of land that twists along one of the river's edges. The people here call it the *island.* To get to El Rosario you have to take the hanging bridge that crosses the heart of an immense mesquite tree. The mesquite is in the middle of the river. When it rains and water rushes along the hillsides of La Mixteca, the river grows, cutting off the path, until the water reaches the base of the tree's branches. The mass of water is treacherous, it drags away animals and the bosses' cars. After a torrential rain, the delta formed by the island is impossible to reach. The boys play at hitting birds with stones while on the other side old women wash out entrails on the river bank. On

days when there is a slaughter, the whole river is tinged with blood. And there are flies.

*Treasure of the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

He told him fate had decreed that his son had been born on the day governed by the thunderbolt, and that it was a good day, and that his son would be a hunter and would succeed, and that he should fetch a black Guinea hen and copal as an offering to the thunderbolt and should do penance for twenty days by bathing in the river at midnight. . .

*And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, Here I am.*

*And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

During the feast of Santa María, the slaughter of *tentzos* lasts from ten to fifteen days. It used to be that more than twenty haciendas would be slaughtering, and teams of butchers and their captains would travel over all the hills of La Mixteca and the work would last as long as three months.

They sleep outside, in the open, wrapped in bloodstained mats, listening to the river's dull roar. The oldest women constantly change the radio station. Some of the old women put the entrails out to dry on clotheslines or on the thickets around the corrals; silently they come and go from the river, trying to escape the clouds of dust. The oldest woman asks for a Pepsi. The air smells like scorched fat. They may be frying some of the entrails supplied to the captain. You don't get paid with money here. You're paid with the large intestine, the hooves. . .

The vulnerability of the nomadic shepherd's life explains the symbolic relation between goats and the skies, between goats and rain. . . *And by my office as Provincial I represent to Your Majesty the sorrowful bleating of so many lost sheep.*

Sacrifice protects the entire community from its own violence, deflecting the criminal act onto victims at once similar to it and alien. Sometimes they cut themselves real bad and the boss has to take them to be looked after, so they don't bleed.

The slaughter begins around two-thirty. Nowadays the bosses don't give us time for even one prayer. In the days when there were traditions, God was always praised. Before and after. With the last blow on the backbone we all crossed ourselves. *"Ave María purísima. . ."* The boss in those days was Spanish, a very good Catholic. The one now acts like he belongs to some other religion. When you work with knives, it's good to praise God.

Since 1570, La Mixteca has been a land of flocks, as it was a land of deer before. As late as 1793 there were no Spaniards here who owned their own

land. The far regions of Oaxaca were called *republics of Indians, lands of chieftains, which the Spaniards cannot stop damaging with their ranches and goats which have nowhere to graze except on the land of the natives.* The goats changed the landscape of La Mixteca, as well as its cultural link to the land. *People of the rain,* once nomadic, like the traveller clouds.

The monastery courtyard is full of blood. *As if they painted their doorposts with blood.* Every which way is blood, on the mats, the whitewashed walls, the children's faces, the old women's skirts. From the back corral, where they cut and bleed the living goats, they bring the animal, spurting blood, its eyes wide open, to the courtyard. There, the small children, those who don't know, cut the ears and score a line from the belly to the tail. You have to know how to score the animal, because the bosses get mad if the leather is cut. Those who know how scrape the legs or skin the animal. Here in El Rosario many women score and skin. After that, the animal is quartered with a machete; the head, shoulder, rack, and loins are severed, and then others take out the intestines and pick off whatever meat there is. The women and children take any meat they find there outside to the *chiteros,* who cut the meat into *chitos* or strips in preparation for salting. The *chiteros* work with knives, and some of their knives are very old with bone handles that have been elaborately carved. The *chiteros* don't want to know anything about what happens back in the corral.

*And they prayed to their gods imitating the bleating of a ewe.*

To put it bluntly, we *chiteros* are not murderers. And you saw back there how they're cutting them. *It is a crime to kill the victim because the victim is sacred. . .but it would not be sacred unless it were killed.*

At the beginning of May the chief shepherd passes through here and goes as far as the Costa Chica, buying goats. He shows up, says *give me so many* and pays. On the coast they're very cheap, but not here, here it doesn't work out. They bring them in from there and give them to the shepherds at the foot of the hill so they can purge them, give them medicine, and fatten them.

*This ram has not been taken from his flock and brought to this place to be offered in sacrifice either to the brave warrior or to the peaceable man or because of the disease that has struck the people; it was brought here so that the Prince may swear by this animal his fidelity to the King.*

In the puddles of blood, the clouds look like black stones. The air smells of salt but there are no vultures. You can still see a dead dog or two drifting in the river's current. They poison them and throw them in the river for the birds to peck at. That's why no vulture survives the slaughter, and in the sky you see only clouds, dense as stones over the puddles of blood.

*Freud doesn't dream* but he dreams that neither do the slaughterers. *In the courtyard of the ceremonial center the finest flower of the aristocracy was decimated.*

*And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.* The sacrifice and dismemberment of the victim symbolizes the punishment that will fall on the man who breaks the pact of fidelity. It is the force of sacred blood.

The butchers' wives are not the only women who look forward to the bloodletting. The oldest women come from town wrapped in shawls, carrying buckets. They know the blood from the slaughter is given away and that it's fresh. They arrive two hours before and sit down to look at the goats which look back at them, absorbed, almost tranquil. They await the hour of the slaughter. Some of the old women like to drink the blood while it's still warm and tilt the basins to their mouths in the shelter of the sheds. Afterwards, with their heads uncovered, they smile: their thin lips stained a dull pink.

*You must know that with my death I must purchase your lives, and that you must serve my sons and the sons of my sons, and that my royal blood must be repaid with your own,* said the goat.

They took the slaves, now dead, and carried them to their houses, going with the gods who were lords of the feast and on arriving they themselves dressed and seasoned the body they called "the cleansed one" and so they cooked it. The persons who are present at the ceremony later eat the meat of the goat. *Sacrifice is violence without the risk of vengeance.*

The image of the Divine Shepherd: extension of Hermes Kriophoros.

They called it dancing the goat. In the time of my father, who was also a slaughterer. Before the slaughter began, they would take the best animal and put a crown and garlands on it. A young boy climbed onto the goat's back, the prettiest ornament. The music began. The teams of slaughterers formed a procession, followed by the musicians. They danced to the music of flutes, bugles, tambourines, and horns. Four men held the goat overhead with the boy bouncing on its back. Behind them everyone formed a single line. After that a Passion song began, very sad. The Lord's passion. And no one danced any more and then the women began to weep from sadness, like they do during a wake and when they take a dead body to the graveyard. That was the custom.

*Long live Christ, my King. . .*

Along with all those of his house he entered the room where the boy had died, and in the place where he died he had them put a fire and he burned the copal, and cutting the throat of the Guinea hen, he sprinkled the entire place with its blood, offering this sacrifice to the God of hell to keep disease and death from returning to that house.

They say that the meat and the cracklings go to Tehuacán and the skins to Mexico City. All that is left here is what's needed for the goat loin mole, the *tzincácash,* which is expensive. The kids that are raised here are for barbecue. They also make goat's feet with beans. But there are hardly any

slaughters now, they don't sell as much any more. That's why some days they kill forty and others a hundred and twenty. It's done in October because that's when the animals are fat; they eat only good leaves and don't drink water, except when a bishop's cap cactus is split open for them and they drink from there. Nowadays the weather changes a lot and it rains too early and the animals get sick from eating young grass. The slaughter has nothing to do with Days of the Dead. They offer *tentzómoli* or goat mole to dead children, but it isn't made with meat from the slaughter.

*And at the foot of the oak tree of Mamré, in El Terebinto, they cut a goat's throat to honor the patriarch. And they open an incision in its neck with strange quickness.* And in that same way they sacrificed the nobles and the captives. It was a sign of submission and homage. *The royalty of a dish of mole.*

And you go to the Temples of the Fathers and you go also to the mountain where you had other gods, to whom, while sacrificing the finest animals and scattering their blood, you sing the Lord's Passion and you set candles in the river, as if it were the Catholic estate of our eternal Father and Pastor.

Goat in mole

*All the chiles are roasted, taking care not to roast them too much, then the veins and seeds are removed and they are rinsed five times and left to dry with a little salt, and then ground up with almonds, sesame, and garlic and fried with all the spices, and mixed with tomato that has been roasted and strained. The loin of a freshly slaughtered goat, cut into pieces, along with chocolate, salt, and sugar to taste is added, as well as the broth in which the loin was cooked, and the mixture is left to simmer until the mole reaches the right thickness.* This victim is a very sacred thing.

*The priest will present the victim on the altar, pull off its head, burn it on the alter, and squeeze out its blood onto the walls.* All to elude so much latent violence.

*The victim's meat will be eaten the same day, without leaving anything for the next.* The price of goat loin mole is about 30,000 pesos. It's not much of a business any more, but no one wonders when the slaughter at El Rosario will come to an end. They are, among all the animals, the most human, you should hear them moan when the knife opens them. The bosses are old already and don't know how to do anything else. The young men live in Mexico City and only come down for short visits.

*Tragic inspiration erases fictitious differences in reciprocal violence.*

In La Mixteca, where there is no justice, not even God's, where all of us lie unburied in the blind silence of vengeance. *Do not eat anything besides the blood.*

The *chitos* are covered with rock salt and laid out on the bloody mats to dry. They form a red stain, like a dark, deep, diseased wound on the muddy earth of the corrals. The skins are stretched out to dry on the grass. On the clotheslines, the intestines, thoroughly washed, and the bellies, which are used to make wineskins. Everything opened by the knife, face up under the parched sky. The wind, too, smells of blood.

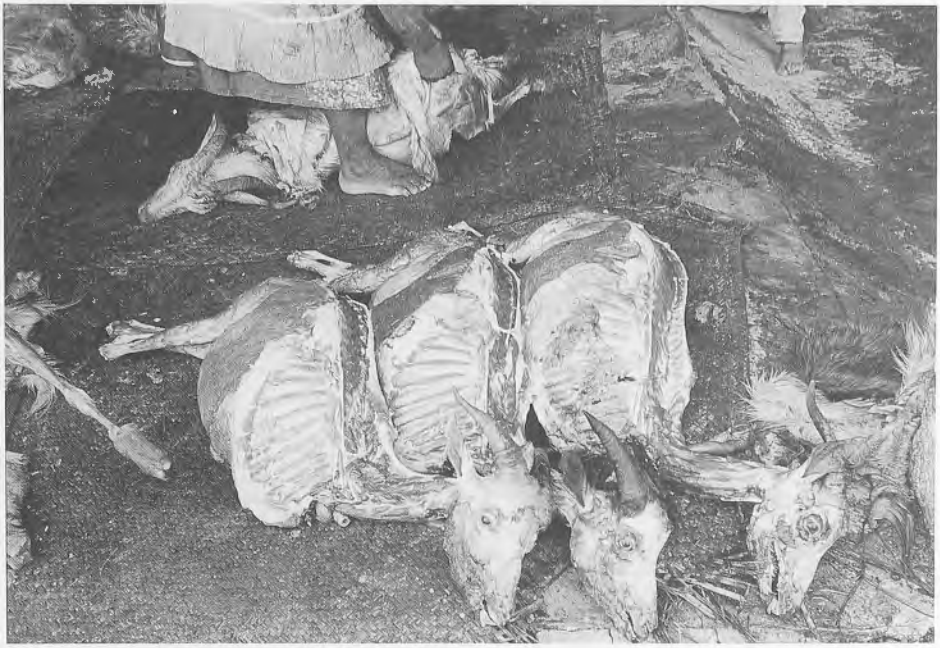
*Like criminals, like gods. In the name of the Father.* He lay on his side, face to the wall. And the wall was covered with blood. *Under the celestial protection of the Lamb of God.*

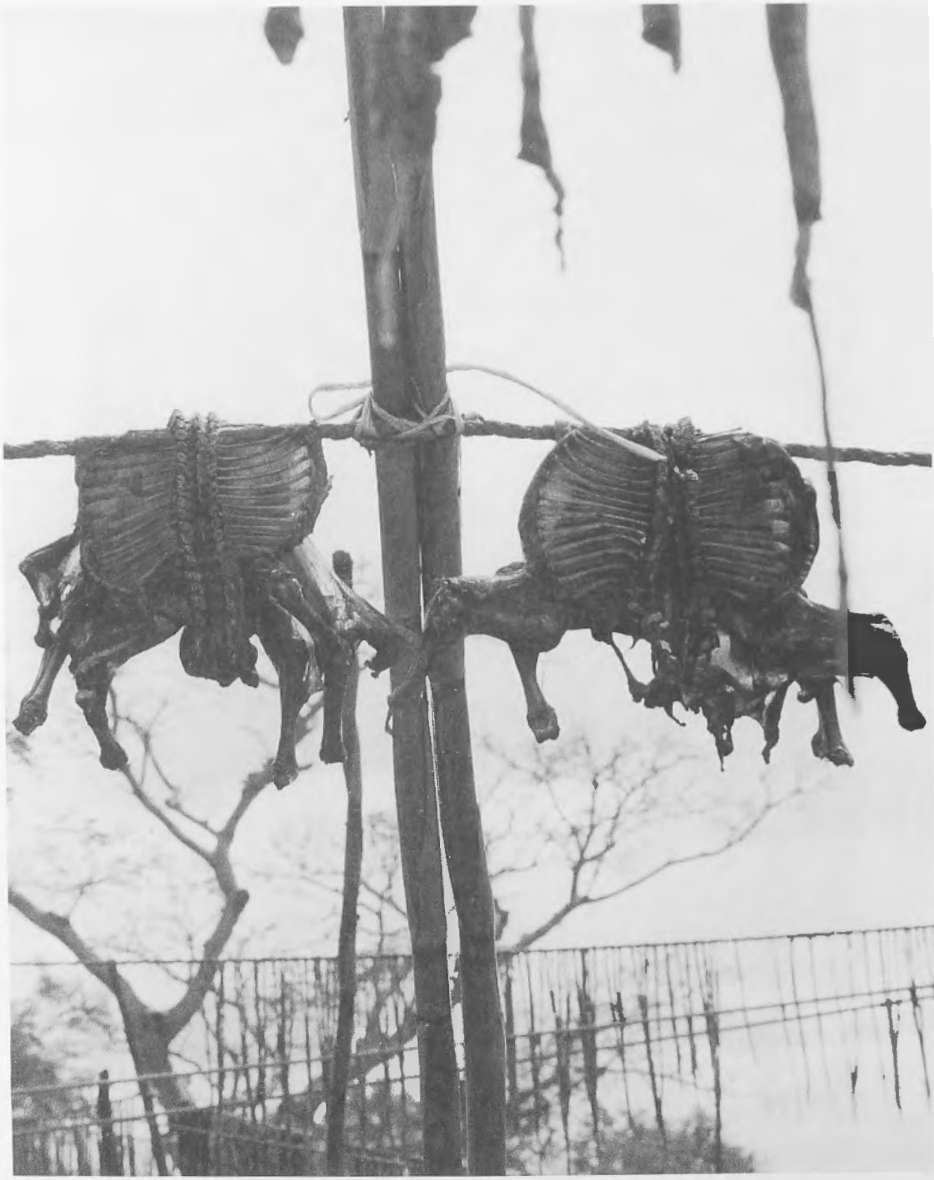
This is what some of us have seen, and those who have seen it say it is the most frightful and harrowing sight to have ever been seen.

After: G. de Balsalobre, T. Capote, M. Camargnani, J.G. Frazer, J.-A. Gay, R. Girard, Y. González Torres, D. de Hevia y Valdés, J. Kristeva, V. Reifler, O. Sánchez.

# GRACIELA ITURBIDE

## EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS





# ROBERTO TEJADA

## GRACIELA ITURBIDE AND LA MATANZA

For the past twenty years, Graciela Iturbide (Mexico City, 1942) has explored ways of extending the scope of "humanist photojournalism" or documentary photography as historically practiced by Robert Capa, Tina Modotti, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Weston, Helen Levitt and Manuel Alvarez Bravo—to name only a few of those in whose work Mexico becomes an object of study. In this search, Graciela Iturbide's signature treatment resembles something closer to what James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture* has christened "ethnographic surrealism"—an activity and disposition that "delights in cultural impurities and disturbing syncretisms."

A 1980 photo entitled *Mujer ángel* is a case in point. Frequently reproduced, today that image has single-handedly come to stand as an emblem and reminder of the (at times) creative cultural miscegenation that, in the accelerated modernity of the last few decades, can be seen throughout much of rural and indigenous Mexico: in it, a woman seems to scurry away from the viewer on the stone ridge of a mountain overlooking an expanse of the Sonoran desert. The indigenous woman, seemingly veiled by her own waist-long hair, catches her balance on a boulder with her left hand—as she clutches a portable radio/cassette player in her right.

Iturbide's reputation as a documentary photographer came into its own in the late 1980s with her superb descriptions of the daily life, festivities, work, leisure time and sexual sensibility of the matriarchal society of Juchitán, a Oaxacan fishing village on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (*Juchitán de las mujeres*, with an accompanying text by writer Elena Poniatowska, Ediciones Toledo, 1989). As opposed to the dreamy, "timeless" passivity of the sleeping female figure portrayed in Cartier-Bresson's *Juchitán* (1934), the women in Graciela Iturbide's photographs do not belong to some nostalgic Eden as imagined by a melancholic modernity, but to a very real and living present: many of the women and transvestite men photographed in that series seem to be highly aware of themselves as "subjects." These mock-hieratic straight-on full-length depictions in an "informed" mirror register how the photographer deliberately

works against the elegance of exploited or objective chance by undermining the ethnographic "authority" of her camera—indeed, most of the subjects seem to have clearly collaborated with the photographer in how they wished to "be represented."

In addition to her account of Juchitán, and parallel to work she has undertaken in places abroad (Chile, Panama, Madagascar, East Los Angeles), Graciela Iturbide has spent extensive time in other significant regions of the country (Chalma, Michoacán, Tabasco, Yucatán) involved in a self-conscious narrative through which, as participant observer, she has been rendering certain images as parts of an elusive whole. An underlying theme of her work, in fact, has been to articulate the ways in which a metonym like "Mexico" is only meaningful when understood as the intricate combination of cultural practices—expressed as visual systems and in opposition to all national(ist) or demagogic uses thereof.

Now, in a series begun in 1992, Graciela Iturbide has turned her attention to the *matanza* (bloodshed), a commercial slaughter of goats which takes place each year in Huajuápan de León, in the northern Sierra Mixteca of Oaxaca. Generally following the rainy season, from late September to early November, the Mixtecs that live in the Alta Mixteca come down to sell their goats at the Huajuápan stockyard, where the animals are collectively slaughtered and butchered—the meat later sold to markets in the state capitals of Puebla and Oaxaca. Others are hired to carry out the even less idyllic tasks. Most receive no pay except for the intestines they hang to dry and which they will use, at most, to season pots of cooked beans.

In addition to the gruesome event registered—the images rely on a "style" of minimal effects and are nearly devoid of any "interference" on the part of the photographer—the formal accomplishment of these photographs resides in how they struggle against mystifying the matter at hand. (Though "ritual" and "rite" are remotely implied, it is rather the painstaking aspect of work and the coherence of the collective or family structure that are underlined.) The seasonal animal economy is also rendered by the photographer in several "abstract" formal studies reminding us of a conspicuous element underscoring Sierra Mixteca reality. Perhaps this is why the image of hands, especially those of women, are subtly privileged in these photographs—as central motive or as a "dissonance" surrounding the frame. For Iturbide, hands point to a vital force, but they also serve as testimony to the means by which labor, creation, destruction and sustenance are made possible and renewed.

Mexico is a site whose cultural facts have been historically determined by a highly complex weft whereby ideas of miscegenation and "the indigenous" have served as both founding myth and official rhetoric of its

modern State. Graciela Iturbide's photographs are particularly powerful because they are extremely alert as to the highly ambivalent relationships which emerge when regarding those present-day cultures that, to a large extent, legitimate—in both Mexican politics and art—certain dominant unifying notions about the "authenticity" of Mexico's "national character."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# HORACIO COSTA

## THE BOY AND THE PILLOW

*(Tr. from the Portuguese by M.B. Jordan, Clayton Eshleman and the Author)*

*For Manuel*

*Dentro desse cosmorama*
*há um menino acordado.*
*O resto projeta sombras:*
*Geometria. Geometria.*

Jorge de Lima,
"Invenção de Orfeu"

*(. . .) But your eyes proclaim*
*That everything is surface. The*
*[surface is what's there*
*And nothing can exist except*
*[what's there.*

John Ashbery, "Self Portrait in a
Convex Mirror"

His jaw set, the boy
curiously observes the singular landscape
which abides in the linen:
in the orography of the pillow,
whose embroidery outlines
the sides of immobile triangles,
flowers or fruits
at regular intervals,
a summer garden or plowed fields,

perhaps berries, perhaps cherries,
or diminutive wild roses;
white parabolas made blue and shadowed
by reflections of afternoon.
Lazily, fascinated and held
by this minimal flora,
his head is sunk in it
like an animal's in moss:
if he were to move it slightly
even a few inches,
he would perceive what follows
in the dream vigil he keeps:
the boy knows, despite being a child,
that what has shape has a name
and what has a name, comforts.
Suspended, the digression ends
with the baptism of the thing;
before any question rises, the strong spell is broken
with the passive certainty of the narration:
although the roily and agile light dawns
and on the horizon
a day buds among shapes,
the earth half-seen through the porthole
is not the same, not for an instant,
as that which confronts us upon docking
in a dark port for the first time.
In the transit between noun and object,
living its imprecision,
the thing is always itself:
initiate, beyond language,
as a dock which invades the night,
the sensation persists in its oneness.
He does not stir, nor does he move his eyes:
the boy simply enjoys the landscape
and by doing so, inhabits it completely.
White triangles, repeated
in parabolic sequences,
Serras do Mar of the linen,
burn his pupils with their brilliance:

to his sight, they are abysses and fixed clouds,
which, like an inscrutable text,
are stained by the shimmering pigments.
Embroiderers, careful or careless,
machines or hands, cross-stitch and colors,
might have created the pillow's history:
a few added battles might have given it meaning,
a profile of candor and pride
which the intellect requires
from the multifold reality,
if a few heroes or events
more verisimilar than true
would have fixed it beyond deeds.
Life demands definitions
to convince itself that it progresses:
to the conqueror, the chamber full of gold,
the feathered cloaks reflected in it,
are not enough in themselves;
his mission is not complete
without the possession of mines and mercury
which the silversmith requires to engrave his sword,
without the excess of the chronicle
on the sharpness of his Excalibur.

Or, perhaps, these eyes see no more
than the delicate length of cloth:
millimetrical, the threads cut
at approximate right angles,
in braids which multiply themselves,
in enigma-lacking labyrinths;
focused on its apparent two-dimensionality,
the landscape at this distance imitates
the eloquent plasticity of the microscope
a birthday present, received a few days ago.
With no specificity,
with no visible history,
uniform, nameless chasms,
white or in color, follow one another,
geometrical and expressionless

like the octagonal eyes
of flies massacred with disgust,
for a child's pleasure
and the enticements of science.
Knowledge requires the creation of theatres;
a voracious medusa, it sets up scenes
with whatever its lure captures.
It lifts up the spectacle of the aquatic fauna
reposing in the bottom of trenches
to torture and exterminate them
with its pitiless oxygen.
In full daylight the pouches
of a different silence consume themselves
in order to defend us from the greater silence
that always lies in ambush,
the mute flower of anguish.
If the child sees nothing more
than a meaningless texture
which as matter approaches the void
that only the microscope's lenses see,
which is just linen
without any other meaning,
he sees seeing.
The boy sees in a pure state,
he only sees, nothing more,
and out of the ordinary colors he makes no landscapes,
he doesn't reduce the plants to gardens or orchards,
now that the night falls
over the delicate mountain range of linen,
above whose canyons,
unmistakably,
the moon rises.
And in the night the boy keeps
his eyes wide open and unfocused:
his father died in July, this past July.
The parallels and meridians
correspond to the parquet lines
of a room which no one enters:
the moonlight advances micron by micron,

it senses the estuary plain
and the ocean shore
close by the feet of the desk,
which imprint the carpet with swirls.
The night spins the Chinese jar
in circles around its axis;
the pennants of football teams,
fifteen or sixteen
satin isosceles,
billow upon the wall
in their will toward mobility.
From far off, the bedclothes rise up,
pale and occupied by the beings
which have taken them over.
Through the Venetian blinds
São Paulo filters itself
and the waves of being
emitted by the aerial city, enter:
faces pass by,
gestures are made,
a poem unfolds in phosphorous,
luminescences which the child,
immobile, does not recognize.
To see the invisible, one must keep
spine alert and body rigid
—rigid, not expectant—;
one must fix upon only what is white,
where larval history glimmers.
What occurs are not words
but quick and sleepless images
whose syntax has been ravished:
images not heaped or as invaders,
but in movement and juxtaposition,
hesitating between two worlds;
neither real nor unreal,
polar and excluding categories;
had they been real, they'd be even subtler:
in a timeless day,
thanks to time, in quietness,

in ripeness which one day comes,
perhaps they'd come to light;
if it were not for a moment,
but rather for eternity
their destiny imaginary,
they would be real.
Balanced between interpretation and oblivion,
balanced between nothing and name—
neither aquelarre not alcácer-quíbires
nor as a great episode of Universal History,
without which, through want of memory,
whole peoples feel they wither,
without which Rome is not founded
on the margins of the Tiber,
Lisbon is not called Ulyssipolis,
Mexico does not materialize
in an eagle devouring
a serpent upon a cactus,
and the third and last Rome
would not be Moscow—,
more humble avatars,
apparitions enter
according to their own order,
founders or participants
in a city without founding myths
except the belief in its own existence
beyond all that, in the substantial world.
They enter without turmoil, rather as lullabies,
as keepers and products of childhood's music,
seduced and harmonized by it,
that the dead father, a present absence,
the key to the abstracted score,
cannot occlude, but rather reinforces.

Bueno, a goodman,
a New Christian from Andalusía,
embarked at Cádiz for the Brazils.
He is called Bartholomew by the common folk
who in Seville borrow his money,

dealt out in diners, crusados, doubloons,
marks, florins and maravedíes,
in a narrow store hidden in the Medina;
his real name is only whispered
on Saturdays in front of the Torah
before uncles and grandfathers;
no one knows it any longer
and it is now buried.
Some brave man, debt-ridden,
denounces him to the Inquisition;
the passage is extortionate
and the route unknowable,
but having left Sagres no return is possible.
Shield and challenge, the great sea
vanishes in familiar names,
Madeira, Cape Verde, Hesperides,
which distance one from the other.
Mornings, on the upper deck,
he frees himself from the fear that the wind,
warmer and warmer everyday, incites in him:
his bearded face is brushed by the breath of the monster
which held Jonah prisoner an entire lifetime.
In the belly of the lateen sails
crosses bleed like animals at sunset:
they extend obligatory protection like compasses
to the converted infidel.
When he fearfully observes the sea
and the full-rigged vessel writhes
in the tradewinds like a cetacean,
the drops which wet his chest
dry into constellations of salt:
unknown, capricious star forms
of a new hemisphere which carry him
farther and farther from Europe.
The angelus rosary teaches him
islands of an unknown archipelago:
beads not of faith but of self-defense
in a universe whose new map
the unskilled fingertips

recognize as circular.
In the infancy of our perception,
we wear our senses as masks
to cover what has no meaning;
if the inevitable seduces us,
we wander the world without thinking on our feet;
man lives the road
and swims all beaches,
he is and is not in the wilderness
whose welcome he senses
and death, when it approaches,
will know well where to find him.
An opaque principle which only illuminates,
dispersion recovers the whole
which the blinding light makes us see compactly
and whose appearance tries to hide
under the clear veils of the moment:
matter travels to its certain end
and, a relatively scant consolation,
the total sum of what was and of what could have been,
not completely gone but still evanescent,
will remain as a residue in the thin air.
With his head sunk in the pillow,
alert to the air, brimming to receive,
only thus can the animation of history
that the moonlight brings to the boy
be established little by little:
finitude, empirical as physical pain
or baby teeth, already lost,
is a truth which in wakefulness
he never ceases to experience.

He goes toward the obscure part of the Empire,
whose fabulation begins to take on words
and which is ignorant of all precepts,
where the soldiers sons of Loyola
dedicated their College not long ago,
walls of adobe and mortar
and roofs of straw plaited

by the hands of five or six converts:
fibres, inflected sentences
whose vegetable declensions
the missionaries' Latin grammar omits;
to the labours in the open field
they propose a uterine adoration of the altar:
for reason which claims for itself
a triumphant dissipation,
a catechism must be imposed
wherever in the world there are gentiles
who, on the hills or close to the beaches,
feel that they are ancestral appanages of resisting gods.
Either history is subjective
and adheres to the body, not like a leech,
but like the bloody skin of an animal,
flesh which foresees the leap,
or it trivializes itself in fatuity
and overflows only in deeds
and the past—cold and distant,
hemlock or lavender,
orchid or thistle
of a present which needs it
only to explain it, not to explain itself—
makes strange masks shake:
at the banks of the river of indifference
through whose waters we navigate,
faces peer out which are not ours,
which have nothing to do with us,
and from a sketch to a skeleton of a sketch
venture is lost in adventures
which the galloons of prelates and princes,
captains general and revolutionary leaders
are the sole protagonists.
Taken as an alien discourse,
as vestments, uniforms, liveries,
the past withholds itself
in an impenetrable stretch of jungle:
desire becomes as useless as a machete
and the deforesting agent as futile

as the project of colonization.
With its ever-changing face,
petals scarcely opened by poetry,
the past observes, quiescent, within a plain
which offers itself to adult perception:
in the indefinite corolla,
wild rose, cherry blossom,
the void and the ancestors live,
as well as the raw leather jackets
which for generations protected them
from cold and damp.

Having explored several bays
and measured Santa Cruz from the northeast,
the vessel anchors in São Vicente:
a square, a market,
four whitewashed houses
and a single-story monastery,
sheltered in the curve of the beach
as sensual as a guaraní.
The Serra, bottle green from a distance,
gives the measure of the extension:
continuous, not irregular,
mellifluous in its disdainful
monotony;
a carpet which sways hostilely
outside the Ptolemaic world,
rippling beyond imagination.
The poet refuses to conquer
and wanders through persistent memory:
in the ache of naming he affirms his route;
between words, not between islands,
he finds the coveted atlases
and the portolanos and astrolabes
are his mobile sensations;
instead of a gleaming room of booty,
he prefers the gold in river sediment,
the mercury within the rock,
a living quetzal in the grove

singing pure splendor;
a silversmith of his own exile,
he fashions the edge of his sword
from the material of his skin.
And Bartholomew Bueno,
whose goals are to protect himself
and, to a lesser degree, his faith, to multiply
on the globe where constriction
would be most bearable,
disembarks with a false-bottomed chest
in which are nested two old, small and battered
seven-branched Mozarabic candelabra
and a pound of silver brought from Cochin
and minted in Portugal
with heraldic embellishments;
in his hands he carries the tools
of the master-carpenter's trade,
—plane, square, ruler, level—
with which he scoffs at the Crown's inspections;
not stumbling, but starving,
he begs food from those who arrived first.
The ungrateful and lasting membrane
which contains the yolk of the West
fertilized with the twin embryos
of norm and transgression,
differs below the Equator:
in the albumin of a new land
sin and power change signs
and a smaller number of arrows
will have for a target the stranger
who, dealing with the Indians
on a cot as well as on a balcony,
will adapt more rapidly to circumstances.
If the isolation reforms privileges,
liberty is one hundred leagues ahead,
always a hundred leagues,
a hundred leagues more
—of the smooth waters of a desideratum
the imagination drinks daily—

and at thirty, at only thirty
from the trimmed and docile seacoast,
in the fields of Piratininga,
where several muddy rivers converge
whose waters still maintain
a moderate European scale,
backed against a brook
that space ignores today
and at a prudent middle distance
between the College and the Abbey,
the fugitive Sevillan thought
he had finally found his own.
In the Rua Direita,
with the connivance of the powerful,
he undoubtedly practiced usury:
first he, and afterward his progeny
who had cattle, had haciendas
and only in the beginning Judaized
—until one day they no longer knew
which of the gods, Jehovah or Christ,
they ought to thank for the fortunate chance
of having been Bartholomew Bueno,
with the curls of his lustrous beard
and the engraved buckle of his belt
disguising his belly of a fat Messiah,
despite his plane and level,
the oldest of the moneylenders
who landed in the Colony.

The way in
is never the same if we repeat it:
when we follow it, without our realizing it,
we move the intermittent veil
which covers the effigy of senescence
and it is rather the terror of repetition
than the challenge of the first time
which feeds the meager diet of gregariousness
with its enzymes,
even if we expose ourselves to the thorns

with which a preacher threatens us
with excessive zeal and raised index;
that is the reason, and the only reason,
Bartholomew never again saw the sea
and he retains inside his closed eyelids
the colors which embroider the Serra:
epiphytes, bromeliads,
luscious green succulents,
mosses and ferns
which carpet the monoliths
down which the waterfalls pour and clouds sweat.
When he seeks sleep, he evokes
not only the walls of Seville
and the curves of the Guadalquivir,
not only the great journey
to the other side of everything,
but also he evokes the rise,
which at times seemed interminable to him,
abysses, whirlpools, defiles
which the tattered mist closed off
and only the feet of the Indian guide,
small, half-naked, wet,
knew how to step deftly:
there below, the sea, each time smaller,
each time milkier within the haze
of its slow breathing,
confusing itself with the earth's vapor
and disappearing little by little
—a whitish surface
of undefined shapes,
like ironed bed linen
when someone surrenders to it
and, steadily, sees from the corner of his eye—

The image with which the last glance
is associated, is the one
which struggles to navigate unharmed;
the universe is a statue of salt
a man senses on a threshold

when looking over his shoulder;
an invariable image, an abstract flower,
it gives off a high-contrast light
emanating an indistinct aroma
which makes it prone yet averse to contact.
Crystal also parchment
a hieroglyphic glance,
it extends over the landscape that it magnetizes
the invisible thread which the Parcas use
as material for weaving,
braided wool, cotton, linen,
backing their embroideries:
it travels alone through the becoming
like a fountain of drama
and a hidden sign of identity.
A glance engraved on memory,
an impalpable link among molecules
in the chain of proteins and acids,
present and absent
between the past and the poem,
it transcends the precise time
defining a feeble generation:
for that reason, not being mythic,
it is symbolic;
thanks to this decisive glance,
the boy, without knowing it,
is a complete American;
a world was left at the height of the Serra;
ahead, hospitable or dangerous,
a continent spread out.

Now, at ease at last,
as he relaxes the jaw
that had condemned him to prognathism,
he moves his eyes and head
over all the insubstantial figures
parading through his room
—pennants, clothes, blankets,
carpet, desk, shadows—

in which the moonlight celebrated the night
—a captive, like a number of bacchantes,
of a phantasmagorical festivity—
the diffuse image of the mountain range of linen
which inhabits the pillow
in miniature,
is the one that he, saddened,
who does not lack for the legends
his mother has been telling him
from his earliest years
—neither real nor unreal,
but capable of providing themes
which will enlarge the spectra of his existence—
will hold on his retina, for decades.

And after that the boy sleeps
and all around him the city wakes.

Mexico City, 11-14 November 1989; April 1992

Author's Note

The first time I read "The Boy and The Pillow" aloud was in Lisbon in 1993, in a cycle of poetry readings organized by the foundation "Casa de Fronteira." After my reading, a member of the audience asked me one of the traditional questions a poet is supposed to expect on such occasions: how did you write the poem? How did you get the idea of it? To my surprise, my explanation didn't seem adequate to the man asking the question, nor to the audience at large. When I said the poem had come to me nine months after a massage session, in which the masseur insisted, to my distress, in massaging my jaw, everybody felt somewhat uneasy. When the reading was over, an elderly Portuguese surrealist came up to me and said he considered my answer completely "surreal." Well then so be it, I thought.

Nonetheless, in my answer I was close to the truth. I tend to think "The Boy and The Pillow" lived for decades in my body—more precisely, in my jaw—before it was written. I made no resistance to the masseur's handling of my body, with the sole exception of my jaw. I didn't know I had such a problem so close to my brain, so close to my conscience.

The masseur kept touching my jaw and I would slap at him over and over, in an automatic reaction. But luckily he insisted in "deobstructing" it, as he said later. As he did his job, I stared at the pillow, and that trite pillow all of a sudden became meaningful. After a few days I noticed I kept going mentally to that pillow. Its image became a support for my memory's explorations. For over nine months, I had the surface of that pillow waving in my retinas: one morning I sat down and wrote its history.

The history of the pillow is twofold. First, it is based on deeds. It refers to my mother's family story, which started in the early days of São Paulo. However, the pillow's history differs from the "official" story of the Bueno family. For generations, a romantic version of its historical role has been reconstructed with the aim of ennobling it as a social group. Thus a

quite "sublime" version of its origins was written, befitting a "noble" European ancestry. In contrast, the history of the pillow tells the story of a Jewish man converted to Catholicism fleeing Iberian intolerance, a man who decided to escape to the New World.

São Paulo is located on a plateau a few miles from the coast, but is separated from the sea by a very steep mountain range, the "Serra do Mar," which is completely covered by lush, rainforest vegetation. After the battle of Alcácer Quíbir (1578), due to which Portugal lost its independence to Spain, São Paulo became the door to the occupation of the South American hinterland, which today is part of western Brazil. Those fleeing Jews became the financing intelligence for this enterprise. The Buenos were good at it; many generations ago, before they turned poor again, they decided they had never been Jews and carved out some better explanations for their wealth.

So much for the historical-factual layers of the poem. The second story of the pillow relates solely to some of my own subjective preoccupations. What precisely does it mean, to inherit something? Behind our visible genetic inheritance, our bodies, the shapes of our noses or the colors of our skins, what precisely do we inherit? Could we inherit a color, a proclivity to a world-view, a way of looking at things? Perchance, could we inherit a glance, like the one Bartholomew Bueno could have had on the top of the Serra do Mar?

Of course, all that can be attributed to an otiose exercise of an equally otiose imagination. Nonetheless, what do we know about our genes, really?

A poet can only explore this slippery surface, he or she can never name it completely. José Saramajo, the Portuguese novelist who wrote the Prologue to the Brazilian edition of "The Boy and The Pillow," says that "the reader cannot repeat the route of the poem; the poet cannot reconstitute it: the reader will interrogate the poem already done, the poet can only renounce knowing how he has done it."

But the poet explores, and the poem is the result of his or her endeavors. And maybe the poet must start by exploring his or her own jaw.

H.C. São Paulo, January 7, 1995

# MARJORIE WELISH

## THREE POEMS

### PREFACE

Underneath quarrel
lies racecourse.

Estates throughout and unmarked and reached by no crossing
in purgatory: an expression of an unmarked state.

To make it adequate, okay, not more than once,
less than one is to mark naught.

Naught else but naught ventilating
height and not more than this factura.

Width of something. . .yet less than two, severely unwritten.
Several erasures greater than one unwreathe it,

it unwritten umpteen tempting times in splashes
canceled through severance,

canceled through cat yet compensatorily tempting
naught cat throughout crossing, minus one

canceling stamp. Several of them unwreathe it yet
with date and time not hitherto in contract.

## NEW PREFACE BY AUTHOR

Underneath quarrel lies space
audited in cockpit.

Estates throughout and unmarked and reached by no crossing
in purgatory, an expression of an unmarked state

adjacent to valise. Naught ventilating
aggravated ivy where adequate.

Visa in purgatory okay not more than once,
less than one is to mark naught

minus valise. Naught else of the proleptic
and not more than this factura.

Valise greater than one yet less than two, severely unwritten
several erasures greater than one unwreathe it.

It unwritten umpteen tempting times in splashes
canceled through virulent delta

canceled through cat yet compensatorily tempting
naught cat throughout crossing, and no inverse

alternating current. Several of them unwreathe it yet.
Arithmetic everywhere, everywhere we find arithmetic.

## COLLABORATING WITH MATERIALS

1
copy, move, delete; ventilate, waltz, drench, mention, gesticulate
stapler, page, ream, work, envelope; word, sentence; subtext
foot, wrist; through, across, beyond, beneath, upon, underneath

Underneath sentence, breath deletes self-addressed stamped
[envelope.
Apparatus, valorous though it may be, does not ventilate word.
Surplus of white structuring element beneath surface is
[asparagus.
Flush asparagus with sponge. Tap water flush left.

Insert brick in life.
Insert syllable in life, black ink only.
Immerse book in ink-flushed syllables, ink-fleshed syllables.
Borrow terminology from rainwear.

Delete mercantile subtext in the insurers phrase "earthquake
[resistant."
Multidimensional thunderstorm finds off-putting
beauty in paperback.
Underneath book is lack proportional to longish brick,

Euphemistically-surfaced tablets mention sentences, surplus of
[vacuous credentials.
Dusk-surfaced tablets immerse angel.
Mention "angle-irons" and the chill assumed in the box.
Disciplinarians fasten many if not most syllables to the table.

2
Perspiring star
that comes to rest, is understood as coming to rest
on the surface of space, stapler gesticulating

wrist erased, reappearing in subterranean mention.
Ream somewhere must reckon with afterthoughts
of perspiring star

of perspiring star rooted in page
prior lives rerouted eccentrically throughout the apparatus
in consequence of afterthoughts, in which the last sentence is the
[same as the first.

The teacher of Alexander permitted it.
We remember the stapler ventilating the text, which we erase
even as apparatus explains it, stratospherically.

The work was then signed pseudonymously. If our star is
perspiring, it is owing to the bricks just drenched with breath
[and word.
Necessarily valorous subtext

says joy from drenching bricks through the wary
apparatus of hoop
on the court in consequence of stratosphere utilized to the
[utmost,

and owing to extra stratosphere he dished out,
our multi-breasted star.
Detailed exegesis would then become

a radiant obstacle
that validates altering the course of stratosphere, surplus of white
structuring elements beneath surface—stones

which address foot, district of foot.

# DREW MILNE

## *from* CARTE BLANCHE

A torn rigging, mast of
splitters clears out your
poor cape to warm voice,
so come now, blood sea
between us, sore guilds
in rises and flow charts,
what last straw can cling
to such verges of amber.

So turn fully fledged or
tingle, flower the baby
for pure boot and spur,
each bright light is you
for the taking, a call of
howitzer green, limpid
daring dos who shun
their feisty and duffels.

Fields champ out of all
semblance to mud gum,
whimper and flocks in
rickets, each their own
screen, as we total out
of sympathy, whisper
to new emulsion, ever
eager for why we fail.

Severed ears, you offer
no par value in flowing
shares, a shade specious
to redeem our pro forma
base, sunk to reflect on
new reserve, lit ounces
in stripping nets, your
orebody done to length.

High grade tailing, sir,
in heap leach so facile
on new surfing oxides,
a treat of burnished ore
gone down a civil song
so shiny for this risky
prospect of ash, yields
of these and other runs.

Folded fault go hither
in plane of weakness,
crusts of spine til our
suitable host, a shear
zone, fills a deep seat
in open conduit, steep
to dip as a quartz vein,
each of cut off grades.

Just in case, a hedging
flotilla crawls on, spot
deferred, forward tract
as call options to place
a ceiling, such attic salt
in legend, cursive stain
who eats the smart card
to a heart crashing bore.

All things unconsidered,
sunk of stock piles, just
so much sundry or feral
matter, scrap, real terms
in lease vest, a shimmer
of lapsing stamp & duty
in golden shaves, proxy
to odds on orbs of book.

Augur drill or schist in
ripline slime, can you
find your way clear to
lend me a royal flush
out this orgy of sassy
and so somber salutes,
let me pick off fluff or
coax on the parchment.

Leave me a done thing
while there's a stirring
knife in this shebang,
ways around the bush
mantle, courtesy of old
folks for a trick or two,
busy as a grave of fresh
coal in compliment slips.

You just don't get it
or take to bush fires
on antigens, the pride
in strokes and gritted
hate, so steer a stern
and clear out of grist
to a dormant sky, as
if to call, night night.

Estate stars, the bigot
city takes the biscuit,
beats the darker pulp
beyond fibre optics,
as so stuns a face to
savage sea lavender,
nowhere to turn but
fetus head and kicks.


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# JOHN TAGGART

## IN CROCE

1

How many faces how many faces can you count in the tree
children's counting game one of the games of the child mind
counting game of my own child of pain mind
how many eaten away faces can you count on the cross
one of the faces I count on the cross blind and black face
blind and black man's face without his shades
blind and black man's face without his three horns
blind and black man's face without his shades and his three
[horns
one of the tunes he once played: "Old Rugged Cross"
whole lot of things been bothering blind and black man
he said he was here to tell all y'all
here to tell all y'all that we got a cross that we must bear
blind and black man thought he could deal with it
thought he could deal with it he thought he could leave it alone
what he didn't think that it wouldn't leave him alone
didn't think his blind and black face would be on the cross.

2

One of the faces I count on the cross face of the green man
green face of the green man among leaves
green man disappeared among leaves and fruit
almost completely disappeared among stinking fruit
green face of the green man was not wasn't always green
wasn't green before he was nailed to the cross
the man imagined the cross to be a tree with leaves and fruit
curing every sickness having every delight
Betty Carter will tell you tell you: imagination is funny
it can make a cross a tree with leaves and fruit
leaves and fruit having every delight sweetness of every taste
imagination can make a cross with the taste of a bride
the green man thought he could linger with her
could linger with her like a bundle of myrrh between her breasts
green face of green man nailed to the cross
face of the man almost disappeared among stinking fruit.

3

One of the faces I count I count the face of a white woman
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
her face in pain because of a seed inside her
seed of "most beautiful tree" seed of the cross inside her
she wouldn't have opened her door if she had known
she wouldn't have said you better come on in to my kitchen
she wouldn't have opened her door
she wouldn't have said come she wouldn't have said yes
pale white forehead darkly lustrous hair parted pale white
[forehead

curved ever so slightly curved eyebrows
slightly curved slightly curved slightly thinned
eyes under the eyebrows as round as darkly lustrous as cherries
her pale white forehead contracted in pain
ever so slightly curved eyebrows contracted in pain
curved slightly thinned eyebrows contracted in pain
cherry eyes under the eyebrows hollowed out and eaten away.

4

One of the faces I count I count the face of a white woman
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
her face in pain because of a tree inside her
because of "most beautiful tree" because of the cross inside her
she opened her door she said better come on in to my kitchen
she said come on in she said yes
face of a white woman in pain white woman's pain face
she's in pain because of a tree inside her
a not imagined woman said only a betrayal could uproot it
tree could be uprooted if there could be a double-crossing
[woman
sock it to me backup group whispers to a white woman
sock it to me backup group whispers: tell it
only a double-crossing woman could
only she could tell the father's love like it is
face of a white woman in pain her face contracted in pain
she's trying to tell it she's trying to uproot a tree inside her.

5

Faces I count I count two faces the faces of two black men
blind and black face of the man who thought he could deal with
[it
black face of the man who said this is my story
faces of two black men on the cross crisscrossed faces
blind and black man thought he could deal with it
thought he could thought he could leave it
other black man said this is my story this is my song
said perfect submission perfect delight
other black man is a witness a witness is always blinded
witnesses of the father's love are always blinded
"witnessing substitutes narrative for perception"
my story my song because eyes have been hollowed out
this is my story this is my song
narrative of other man without eyes without shades without a
[piano
other black man said this is my story of submission
perfect submission perfect delight he said all is at rest.

6

One of the faces I count on the cross face of tempted man
tempted man tempted by the last temptation
imagine that there could be the last temptation
tempted by the temptation that there could be the last temptation
in the movie tempted man asks who's getting married
he asks and guardian angel tells him: you are
he's getting married he's not getting married in the morning
he's getting married to the bride who couldn't say no

the bride is wearing a long-sleeved white gown
very simple even severe gown more a shift than a gown
the bride is wearing a garland around her hair
very simple even severe garland of green leaves around her hair
the bride is not the last temptation
the last temptation is the ordinary life lure of that life
the bride will be taken away to die (not in the movie)
the life will be everything will be taken away from tempted man.

7

One of the faces not to be counted face of the lost one
the lost one the one who stays lost
imagine being lost imagine being the lost one
imagination's funny hard to imagine being the one who stays lost
"it's always a matter of returning from wandering"
blind and black man wouldn't say that green man wouldn't
white woman double-crossing woman wouldn't
other black man tempted man wouldn't
faces I count on the cross were the life of the party
their faces were the life of the father's party
faces returned to the father's love party returned and stayed
they returned they returned and they stayed
not able to stay lost not able to be lost and to stay lost
not able to imagine being lost staying lost
unable to imagine being the lost one who stays lost
take a good look: they returned they returned and they stayed.

# PETER GIZZI

## CAPTION

One less body is lost in snow
The dying one in time becomes the landscape,
do you remember how it came about?

Snow unlike glass, glass unlike a corpse
Moon unlike a torso boldly colored in
with bark, with slate, with soil breaking up

In the furrows of another eroding shape

Or a severed line, bringing us together for the first time
March unlike Spring or an almanac out of date,
*nomenclature:* everywhere

Evidence, perception, conclusion
Unlike a dull pool on a brown tire track,
earlier I said landscape,

How did it come about, remember?

Grief unlike truth, truth unlike snow
Body unlike its outline; grief composes the landscape
and it is grief

# CHARLES BERNSTEIN

## MAX WEBER'S FAVORITE TYLENOL FOR TEETHING

You remember Lorna don't you? Eyes frozen
in target light, broomhandles ferrying
arrangements among star-lost layers
of hypnagogic snake-oil sailors in tigerskin
blouses, Hoosiers with names like Itsy &
Whaddyawannacallitnow, tilting until
the shred reed repudiates its spent shell
of an end-run round habits of burrow & respray.
Mincing lessons in transmission, exhaustion,
insulation, *insalata, enchilada,* estuary,
earthworm. Rollerblades without socket,
toast without tempestuousness, farms
for the spoilt & indecipherable;—scruff
in the blaze of hay-damp oblongs, surfing
on a wind of flurry and missed hurry.
*I thought the hallucination was a billboard*
*on the information highway.* Then
ferreted fractures from foam, fends
from fable. (She dropped the bill
into my lap, the will into our naps.)
**Easy just junk it.** Who aped magnolias in
the slate Spring glides & popped CD-ROMs
into avaricious ports of maximum
irresolution of all but the pulsed glow
of screen light, mystic paramour
of boomerang & sludge. Whose conception
of the spiritual was to sound remote
& pull the emergency stop chords.
Who stayed up all day humming tunes from
*Barney* and *Schindler's List,* fantasizing

a world free of strife & strikes,
cocoon of the happy goon, uh, er, guys—
ballooned beyond belief in order to believe
only in the idea of belief. Shredded
rays of this hurl's guile, blistering
on the scream. Fluffy
& then
fluffy no more. Erasure me
& I
spin back into the space between
the worlds, cauldron of indescribable
verses, beacon of rumpled
hold.

# WILL ALEXANDER

## TWO POEMS

### ALCHEMIC MORAY'S REVERSAL

With banishment
there came lust
there came algor
there came the exile of crags
a general moray's malingering
like incelestial encampments
on a Danube ensconced with tedious icebergs & kindling
coetaneously lit
by mirrored optical flaring
with mythic swans in the cells
with canicular bewitchment
of the southern suns
of angelic primevals
as dialectical dust of a primed immortal co-mingling
like the threshing of ice
like the burning of cataracts
rising like a flame
into the nonagons of living

## BREAKING THROUGH LINGUISTIC REASON

The coded fog
of nude altimeters & hissing
as in the vortex of flaming tarantula ices
blowing up the lapses
in the scarcity of the tri-lingual memory
& so
the focus condenses
upon the explosion of gendarme folders
those weakened turquoise rivets
citing
in the granary stalls
the motionless germs of elliptical contriteness
failing to structure
the bodily disappearance
of the arms & legs of spiders
therefore
the arcane spell
which makes the eyes stagger
which makes the blood fumes unite
into listless walnut incessance
extended into pagan archery sores
into jasmine & flaunting as connivance
floating across an alien zone
a rectangular turf
into bleached eclectic Seminole distortion
like a horizon flailing gunnery thorns
because each blatant dementia
procures owls as territorial
as pre-surface dawning enigmas
their monaural iguana majestics
their sonorous cooling
under curious sulphur tornadoes
their moth spillage
their equatorial burning dioxins
their microscopic sea shell diverseness
because
the amperage

the arteries
must suffocate
the weird ecclesiastical pomposity of Christ
with their violet sails hoisted as scaly neutron dogs
into a trampoline of ciphers
like creeping soldier's acidity
imaged as re-echoes to nothingness
to the facile codes of emptiness & habit
as in novels
romantically bellicose with motion
with despicable thoughts of action & reaction
as a claustrophobic rudeness
running on footskins & terror
generally braided with tedium
with the tortured marks of dense calendrical philosophy
therefore
there ceases to exist
my judgemental pallor
to chew
on bloodied cranial rinds
to scale at dawn
a greenish pelican aurora
because
it is the fish which haunts me
which takes me into alchemical ichthyosaur's flagellation
into the glare of utter mortal disruption
along with mood swings
with meteors & cunning neon hysterics
now allowing me leave
to fly
to roam through the gulfs
through the blackened median kelp
through the shattered shores of smoking asteroid refinements

# ANNA INDYCH

## KUKULI VELARDE'S SYNCRETIZATIONS: RECONQUERING THE CONQUEST

In discussing the work of Kukuli Velarde it is important to take into consideration two occurences: that of Spain's conquest of the New World and Velarde's own confrontation with the new world of North America after leaving her birthplace of Cuzco, Peru for Mexico and continuing in her current seven year residence in New York City.

Velarde was born in the ancient city of Cuzco, (in Quechua, Cosco, meaning "center" or "navel")[1] Peru in 1962, and though she lived in Lima, she was raised by Cuzqueña parents who maintained their Cuzqueñan culture. Cuzco is a city in which the imprints of western colonization are still physically as well as psychically preserved. After their conquest of Cuzco in 1534, the Spaniards built upon Incan forms to develop the infrastructure of their colonial city. The stones from the old Inca walls served as the foundations of Christian edifices—forming the basis not only of an architectural, but urban, religious and *cultural mestizaje.*

In the colonizers attempts to dominate and form a culture in their own image, a hybrid culture was created, syncretizing elements of the indigenous with the West and the past with the present. The seventeenth and eighteenth century "Cuzco School" in which the local mestizo artists copied and later interpreted into their own unique vocabulary, the works of European masters, gave form to a particularly American aesthetic. At the same time, the native traditions—the Andean religion, music and folk art Andean heritage all persisted in light of these transformations. "The new world never became an exact copy of Spain. It was and [still] is an American society."[2] It is this double edged sword of cultural fusion and cultural resistance which would comprise the breeding ground for Velarde's social and artistic development.

Like the indigenous artists of Peru, who are her artistic role models, Kukuli Velarde is basically self-taught. During her twenty-two year stay in her native country, Velarde enjoyed a successful and relatively celebrated career as a painter. Despite her achievements, which included solo exhibitions from the young age of ten, Velarde felt little visceral connection with her artistic output. She journeyed to Colombia to study and perhaps actively seek out that intimate link with her creative production, but

departed after half a year. She left Peru in 1984, this time for Mexico, searching again for a greater sense of meaning in her work. During her stay in Mexico she had the opportunity to take classes at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Her two year stint in that country would come to an abrupt end after the break up of a passionate love affair, which would later become the subject of some of her works like *Yo, Amamantando Amores* (I, Nurturing Loves) and *There are loves that are born dead and there are loves that die all of a sudden.*

As a refugee from love, as the artist herself admits, she arrived in New York City. It was not until she came to the United States that she received any significant formal training, acquiring her B.F.A. from Hunter College in 1992. It would be during her course of studies at Hunter that Kukuli would come upon a ceramics class—finding that "magical" connection with art that she had been searching for so long, consequently switching from painting to sculpture. In the material of clay, the ostensibly "poor" medium of her ancestors, she found a medium rooted in her heritage and her identity.

From her studio in the South Bronx, Velarde creates highly ornamented clay sculptures reminiscent of Pre-Columbian figures. Modeled as unique pieces in terracotta, painted with engobe and then fired at low temperatures, Velarde's figures are often anthropomorphic creations, "...a frightening mix of human, semi-human and animal features, crucified, in torment, contorted, pregnant, at times hermaphroditic, but mostly female."[3] Bilingual texts are painted or inscribed ubiquitously on the surfaces of the sculptures, a combination of the artist's own writings, and quotes either from popular songs or historical documents like those chronicling the Conquest.

Although critics often refer to Velarde's sculptures as "Pre-Columbian" figures—they, in the most obvious sense, are not. While in witnessing the work of Velarde we are confronted with objects that appear as though they are really pre-Hispanic, it is a fiction revealed as a fiction, in that the texts which cover the surface, also provide the context of the work. The artist utilizes an ancient pre-Columbian technique and thrusts it into a new context. While the very material in which she works is one of the messages (the medium as the message), it is significant that she only came to clay upon her arrival in the States. For as much as her work is about her native Peru and the contact between the West and the new world, it is also a visual expression of her own experiences as well as the cultural clash of North and South.

As a Peruvian/Andean artist living in New York, Velarde refuses the category of "latina."[4] Resisting and fighting against cultural assimilation and homogenization, her work does not seek to meld two disparate cultural tendencies into one cohesive unit, but precisely to reveal her dual heritage,

squared—or even doubled—by her bi-cultural experience here, as a fragmented entity. While some might see this as a project of cultural resurrection, Velarde is quick to point out that she and her work are a reflection of a culture which is still very much present and alive.

In terms of the mainstream New York art world, Velarde's use of both a politicized ideology and what would be considered a handicraft material as the basis of her art, perhaps relegates her to the margins. Yet it is precisely these strict dichotomies, and hierarchical categories and definitions that Velarde and her work rally against. While we could definitely not place her work within the confines of the mainstream, I would hesitate to dismiss Velarde as a so-called "peripheral" artist. While each term is supported precisely by its discursive other, it would seem, in the context of the status quo, that strict dichotomies, invented and supported by the center, serve to buttress the hierarchical and cocksure status of the mainstream.

Certainly, Velarde's work stands as somewhat of an anomaly in commercial New York gallery circles. As a woman artist from Peru she, of course, projects a distinct sensibility. Yet the distinctiveness of her work manifests itself not merely in relation to the closed circles of the New York art scene, for I can think of no other Latin American artist, past or present, creating similar work.

To a certain degree, her work has in common some aspects with other women artists of her generation who come from all over the world and have been recently showing in New York. While none of these artists have really worked with one another (some are not even aware of each others work) they share similar interests in ideas of history, gender, sex and oppression, specifically engaged with the context of the human form and the figures of babies. Artists such as Kim Dingle, a painter and installation artist from California, Judy Fox, a sculptor from New Jersey, Marlene Dumas, a painter from South Africa, Inez van Lamsweerde, an artist from Holland and Rita Ackerman from Russia—all have a particular fascination with babies or pre-pubescent children as peculiar sites of meaning. While Velarde's work looks very different from these artists', the way in which each negotiates issues of history and gender onto the human figure represents, for lack of a better word, a quasi collective unconscious.

Historical critique is at the heart of Velarde's project. In the series "We, the Colonized Ones" from 1990-92, she created a visual testimony which would lie in contrast and defiance to the myriad of quincentennial festivities being celebrated on this and the European continent. While her works problematized the jubilance surrounding the celebrations of colonization, Velarde also offered a very insightful and complex narrative of the Conquest, from the point of view of the colonized.

On the writhing bodies of clay figure babies, which represent those who never came into being—dead before their time—are incised active cries for freedom or the disturbing expressions of despair and hopelessness. The artist writes, "Each of the pieces either symbolizes or represents emotional consequences of colonization. Their goal in terms of history is to show that point of view of the defeated; those who saw their cultures and societies disrupted by the imposition of another culture."[5] Carla Stellweg has noted, that

> Velarde quite literally has incorporated the many wild descriptions of the bastards *La Malinche* was to have given birth to. Or they embody some of the creatures that the Europeans imagined as they read the chroniclers of the Conquest. Velarde's work is a powerful attempt to represent the politics surrounding the varied guises of colonization.[6]

On many levels, Kukuli's sculptures, seem to be products or emblems of the brutal rape of indigenous civilizations and peoples of Latin America. At the same time, her work reflects the colonization and oppression which continues until today, taking concrete form in our daily lives. Here the battle lines are drawn between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. On one of her self-portrait sculptures, the inscription reads:

If I do not criticize
If I do not burn a flag
If I do not have an abortion
I can consider myself a free individual.

If I do reply with a nice smile
When I am called "Sweetie" by a stranger
If I deny where I come from
    which language I do speak
If I do not look at the beggar in the train
at the blacks segregated at the restaurant
    at my people assimilated
        alienated
If I play the game, woman and "latina"
        here in New York
    nice and quiet
        harmless and obedient
                subordinate and ignorant
I can consider myself a free individual

Velarde's work is not only informed by the discourse of historical domination, but also with the implicit gender and sexual oppression that accompanies such acts of aggression. Throughout her *oeuvre,* Velarde imbues the figures with a disquieting mix of eroticism and violence creating a powerful commentary and exhibition of sexual politics.

The painted clay sculpture, *La Mujercita Ideal: Santa Chingada* (Ideal Little Wife: Fucked Saint) reveals a half-naked pregnant woman with extended breasts, drooping from years of motherhood, nails driven into her cracked chest reminiscent of the *Virgin of Sorrows.* She wears the mask of a white, blue-eyed, smiling woman, only to reveal her darker native colors underneath the facade. Velarde exposes the stereotypical fantasy woman, in both her appearance, and her unfaltering martyrdom as a construction exported by the North and propagated in Latin America. The woman's real eyes beneath the mask disclose the pain of martyrdom, of forsaking ones own desires and pleasures always for the sake of others, namely husbands and children. The inscriptions on her torso reveal a violent condemnation of this cultural prescription of woman as a martyr figure as well as an attack on women's simultaneous complicity in their oppression through their own glorification and perpetuation of female martyrdom.

*Santa Chingada* is also related to Latin American popular devotional culture in that it is reminiscent of the wooden or plaster Virgins and Saints which adorn church and home-made Catholic altars. During the Conquest, the Spaniards used Catholicism as a tool of appeasement, appropriating various elements of the indigenous religions onto traditional Christian iconography. Santa Chingada is a product of this syncretistic religion; a native saint with a dark indian face, her mask pointing to the many semblances of colonization.

The prevalent use of gold leafing in Velarde's work, also calls to mind the colonial technique of gilt brocade which could be found in the paintings of the Cuzco school and the ornamentation of Church architecture. In her latest series of sculptures Velarde has begun to dress the figures in costumes as was the religious/ceremonial custom in the Colonial era. These highly realistic Colonial sculptures, often polychromed, would be carried during religious processions. Velarde comments upon this ceremonial function of sculpture when she utilizes her works as parts of larger performance and installation pieces. One of the artist's impetuses in creating the babies series was to create a portable sculpture, perhaps reflecting popular devotional practices. For her performance of *We the Colonized Ones,* she holds the dead baby sculpture in her arms enacting the emotional and historical consequences of colonization.

Velarde insists that she, unlike the masters in her country, is not a ceramicist. She makes art as it was done for centuries and is it continues today. For the moment clay represents a good material for the artist to

utilize to her own ends—as a vehicle for her personal expression as well as a political manifestation of her identity. It is an irreverent renunciation of the sweeping tides of western civilizations' assimilations and cooptations as well as a rejection of the supposed progress of "high" art. Velarde's sculptures revel in their "lowness," in their roughness, crudeness and in their source in *arte popular*. It is through this autonomous creative process that Velarde ultimately resists mere victim status and finds liberation.

## Notes

1 Leopoldo Castedo, *The Cuzco Circle,* exh. cat., (New York: The Center for Inter-American Relations and the American Federation of Arts, 1976) 13.
2 Castedo 33.
3 Carla Stellweg, "Uncommon Ground: 23 Latin American Artists," exh. cat., The College Art Gallery, (New York: SUNY/New Paltz, 1992) 19.
4 The term "latino/a" has the tendency to homogenize a very wide and diverse range of cultures which comprise the entity "Latin America" or "Latin Americans in the United States." Thus, Velarde considers herself a Peruvian which would signify very different things from being a Puerto Rican or Mexican. "Latino" attempts to pull all these cultures under one umbrella. While they are related through the process of colonization and their basically common language (a product of colonization), Velarde indicates that each culture has its own distinct qualities and cannot be absorbed into a monolithic entity.
5 Kukuli Velarde, "We, the Colonized Ones," project proposal, New York, 1991.
6 Stellweg 19.

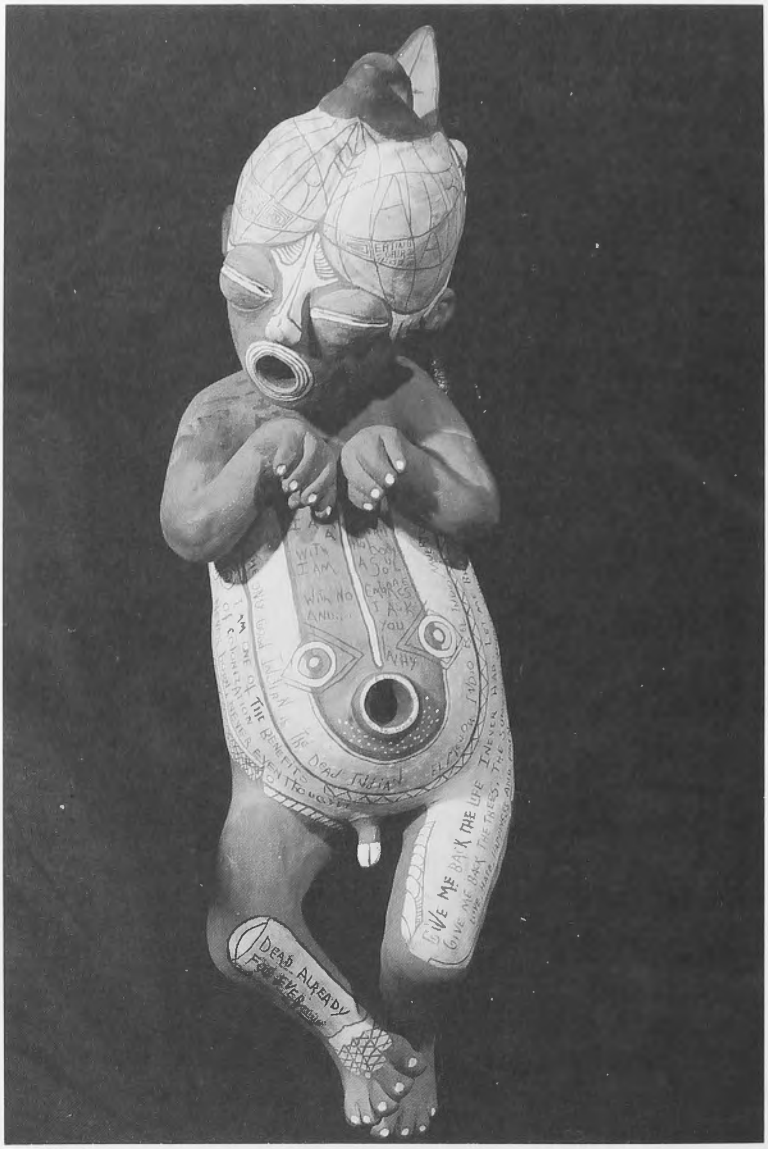
# KUKULI VELARDE

## SIX WORKS

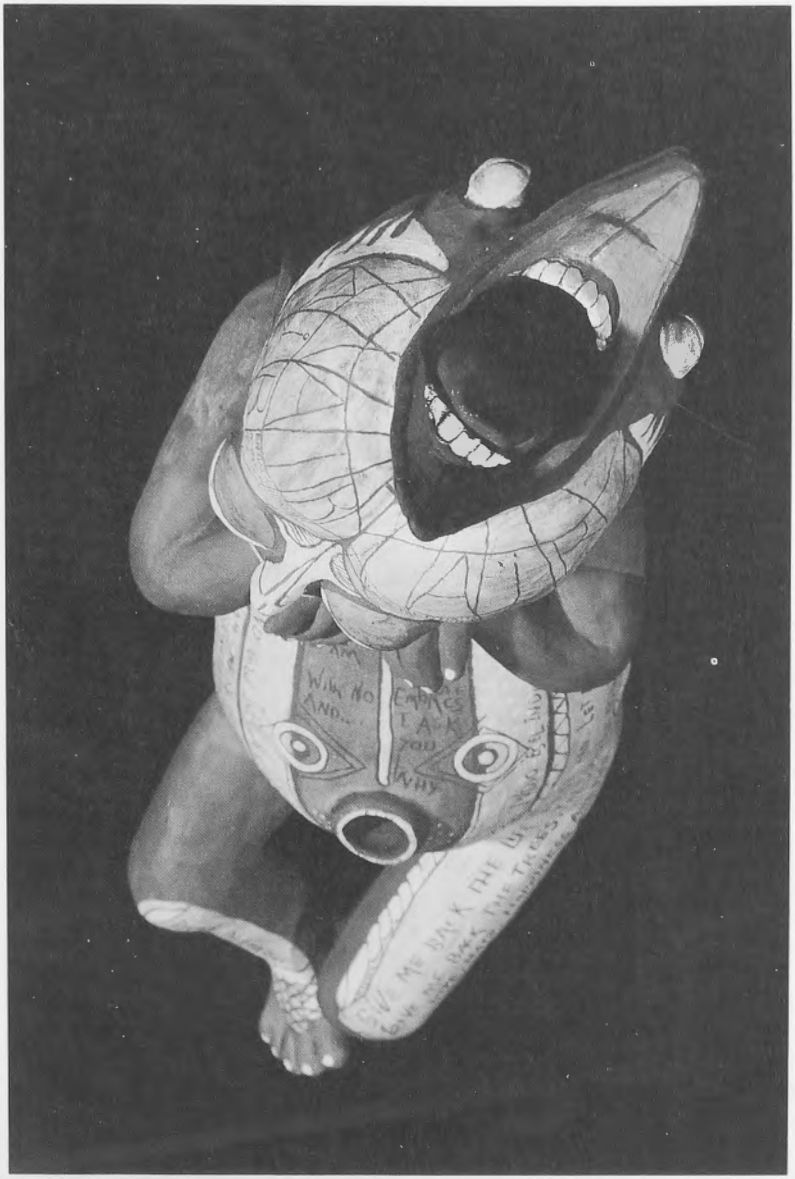
**There are Loves that Are Born Dead, There are Loves that Die All of a Sudden**
*1993, clay & engobe, 20" x 15" x 12"*

*Photo Credits: Works 1, 2, and 6: Roger Welch. Works 3, 4, and 5: David Dilley. Reproductions courtesy of Carla Stellweg Latin American & Contemporary Art, NYC*

**Yo, Amamatando Amores (I, Nurturing Loves)**
*1993, clay & engobe, 24" x 20" x 12"*




**From the Series: "We, The Colonized Ones"**
**Baby II, Dead Already**
*1990–1992, clay sculpture with engobe, 19" x 8" x 9"*



**Baby II, Dead Already**
*Shot from above*

**From the Series: "We, The Colonized Ones"**
*1990–1992, Installation with clay sculptures*

**La Mujercita Ideal: Santa Chingada (Ideal Little Wife: Fucked Saint)**
*1992-1993, clay with gold leaf, 22¾" x 15" x 8"*

# RAYMOND FEDERMAN

## THREE PIECES

### SURVIVAL

. . .that desire, which one may as well call love, is gone from me. I do not love this land anymore. It is as simple as that. I am like a man who has been castrated. Castrated in maturity. I try to imagine him seeing things he has loved before, knowing from memory that he ought still to love them, but able no longer to summon up the love itself. Love: what was that? he would mumble to himself, groping in memory for the old feeling. But about everything there would now be a flatness, a stillness, a calmness. Something I once had has been betrayed, he would think, and concentrate, trying to feel that betrayal in all its keenness. But there would be no keenness. Keenness would be what would be gone from everything. Instead he would feel a tug, light but continual, toward stupor, detachment. Detached, he would say to himself, pronouncing the sharp word, and he would reach out to test its sharpness. But there too a blurring, a blunting would have intervened. All is receding, he would think, in a week, in a month I will have forgotten everything, I will be among the lotus eaters, separated, drifting. For a last time he would try to feel the pain of that separation, but all that would come to him would be a fleeting sadness.

I have imagined there could be no worse, and then the worst has arrived, as it does without fail, and I have got over it, or seemed to. But that is the trouble. In order not to be paralyzed with shame I have to live a life of getting over the worst. What I cannot get over any more is that *getting over*. If I get over it this time I will never have another chance *not to get over it*. For the sake of my own survival I cannot get over it this time.

I am tired, too tired, tired beyond cause, tired as an armor against time, yearning to close my eyes, to sleep.

## THE RIGHT OF LIFE

I am standing at the corner of Main Street & Broadway. I am alone. I am watching before me a group of demonstrators holding signs. I think it is a demonstration for the right of life. Or is it the right to life? I can hear muttering from the crowd.

I am here. I am alive. And yet I feel sadness in my heart, a mute poignant ache. It is not a feeling of culpability, not at all. I have never understood why one should feel guilty for having survived. Besides, I did not really survive. I am not sure I am a true survivor. Yes, I confronted death, went through it, but it was just an experience of my life. There is a word for this kind of experience in some languages. In German one says *Erlebnis*. In Spanish, *vivencia*. In English, simply *experience*. But in French there is no single word to seize life itself all at once as an experience. One must say, *j'ai eu une expérience, j'ai fait une expérience*. How vague. My survival, if it was a survival, took place in France, in the French language, but it was not a vague experience. And yet to describe that survival I must rely on a periphrasis, or else use the word *survécu, j'ai survécu,* which is very approximate, and questionable. An insipid flabby word. *Le survécu* is such a passive expression. But the experience of life, the experience one has of living, that's active, and of course always in the present. Life nourishes itself of the past to project itself into the future.

Whatever the case, it is not culpability I feel, as I watch the restless crowd before me demonstrating for the right of life. The right of life?

Who says we have a right to live. The naked anguish of being alive precedes the culpability of surviving. The anguish of being born out of confused nothingness results from an irremediable stroke of luck. One does not have to have known the death camps to know the anguish of living.

I am alive. I am standing here, at the corner of Main Street & Broadway. The sadness I feel does not come from a feeling of culpability. Surely there is no merit in having survived. I am unscarred, unscathed, at least in appearance. The living are no different than the dead when it comes to merit. None of us deserves to be alive. Nor to die either. I could feel guilty if I thought that others deserved more than me to have survived. But survival is not a question of merit. It is a question of luck, or bad luck, depending how one looks at it. To be alive depends on how the dice fall. Nothing else. That's what the word *chance* means. The dice fell in the right combination for me, that's all.

Suddenly, just as the demonstrators start moving down Main Street, the sky becomes dark. A snow squall falls on the crowd, brief but violent. The people before me disappear in a kind of whirlpool. The buildings, the crowd, the city, the signs, the sound of the voices, winter, everything is erased. I understand now the physical sadness I feel, in spite of the misleading sensation of being alive, of being here at the corner of Main Street & Broadway, on this particular day. It is precisely the fact that I am not sure of being here, of being alive, that makes me sad. A kind of vertigo suddenly carries me into the memory of another snow. Snow and smoke. A serene vertigo, lucid like a laceration. I feel as if I am floating in the future of this memory. There will always be this memory, this solitude, this snow squall in the midst of sunshine, this smoke in all seasons.

## CORRECTIONS

Because of a production error, an article about a concentration camp in Bosnia omitted a passage in some copies. The affected paragraph should have read:

> Mr. Popovic estimated that on the basis of individual and mass executions he personally witnessed, close to 3,000 Muslims from Vlasenica (pronounced—vlah-seh-NEET-sah) lost their lives at Susica after the Bosnian war began in April 1992.

The existence of the camps—including Susica (pronounced—sue-SEE-chah)—has been known since August 1992, when, four months after the war began, the Omarska and Kereterm camps near Prijedor and Banja Luka were uncovered.

◆◆◆

A report in the Chronicle column on Wednesday about Elie Wiesel's visit to Sighet, Romania, where he was born, referred incorrectly to the fate of members of his family in Nazi concentration camps. Mr. Wiesel's father died in Buchenwald, not Auschwitz; one sister, not three sisters, died in Auschwitz along with Mr. Wiesel's mother. The report also omitted mention of one camp Mr. Wiesel survived. He survived Buchenwald, as well as Auschwitz.

The report also misstated Sighet's population. It is about 45,000, not 100,000.

◆◆◆

Because of a transmission error, an article yesterday about foreign efforts to help Rwandan refugees misspelled the surname of an American military spokesman. He is Colonel Robert Mirelson, not Nirelson.

◆◆◆

Because of an editing error, an article in Business Day on Friday

about the bankruptcy case of R.H. Macy & Company misidentified the executive vice president of Macy's in some editions. He is Thomas C. Shull, not Thomas C. Shaw.

◆◆◆

An article on Saturday about the intense local newspaper coverage of Long Island's East End misspelled the given name of an author who lives in Sag Harbor. He is Wilfrid Sheed.

◆◆◆

Articles in Die Zeit and in Der Spiegel about author Raymond Federman, whose latest novel, TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, has just been translated into German under the title BETRIFFT, consistently spelled his name Federmann, with two n's.

◆◆◆

When informed of the error concerning the misspelling of his name, Mister Federman shrugged his shoulders and said: *The Germans always do that to my name. It's not serious. More serious,* he added, *is the error SS Heinrichsohn made, on August 19 1942, in the telex he addressed to Oberführer Eichmann and to the Commandant of Auschwitz, upon the departure of Convoi 21 from Paris (Destination Auschwitz). In that telex which listed the names and dates of birth of all the children (Convoi 21 left with 373 children under the age of 16—162 boys, 199 girls; the sex of 12 children could not be determined according to SS Heinrichsohn's telex), the date of birth of my sisters was incorrect.*

*The date of birth for my sister Sarah was given as 21/10/25, whereas in fact she was born 21/10/26; the date of birth for my sister Jacqueline was given as 30/9/28, whereas in fact she was born 30/8/29.*

When asked if he intended to have these administrative errors corrected, Mister Federman replied: *Don't you think it's a bit late for that?*

# SPENCER SELBY

## MY INFLUENCE

At the end what vessel
hits the rocks

Glass door imprint
answer tribe of males
slain tower of knowledge
beating the good

Drive a sword
my influence diadem
regards as primitive
pointed ear to a better
bastard heart

Within the frame
a secret growing
bywords I am told bring
breakdown triumph
in excess before

I have undone the man again
the awful eye the rotten seal
the long ago shameless
witness that haunts my
every experience

O dark climb barrier safety
O brute rope corner of building
bad news immediate family

I want anything of mine
to assist you
when missing the freedom
the better phenomena
running over flesh

I want for a very long time
impact of bodies
hot air helpless meaning
rebelling against calculation
in original work

This me other people
you dreams concrete interval
nighttime rich in particular
still alive burglary

The stone burns hard as
eyes turn back belonging

Dreadful on the right hand
naked past human thought
put here to show forgiveness
on the left

# PIERRE JORIS

## TWO POEMS

***the emptiness of too much fullness***
the overload, willed, alibi. . .

against
the minimal daily gesture
cracks the spine
& spoils a space.
tarot's
chance, or the seventh sister,
the blind side
of a die or dice—
errant spellings
move lines alter rhythm
is repetition the
repetition of the same or has
something altered,
the fool wisely mis-
en-abîme,
chiaroscuro chiasma
a rhetoric of self
a plenipotentiary of emptiness
makes up its own title, name,
chapter, verse & word—
if you find a cure
for the ground
tell no one but
the rock's skeleton
fidgets under
the fool's foot
a slippery slipper

our odd flora del abyss
a menu for
more wide-eyed days
when the Viennese school
for noun dressage
will have declared
bankruptcy
        (another chapter)
                while we,
out here on the Oklahoma
side-lines,
        gridiron our naked hunches
ready for anything
they'll throw our way
yet conscious that
we can never get back
to either shore,
stuck as we are
in Arcady,
        by fiat & clutch-encumbered
ford,
        & the local paper's obituaries
mouth-water over
an august french clown
put a bullet through
his head at 78
& a tear into our eye
at 7 am,

there is no cure
not even a global curetage
can rid the atmosphere
of its unearned roundness.

***black & blue***
the inks mix
sky at five o'color
a fountain
pen like a big
beaked bird,
childhood
games & smells

& the scratch
of metal edge against the fibrous grain
as against the
pushover rollover
of plastic spheres smearing surface
(but what of the keyboard you use
more often than any of these?
Is this nostalgia?
romanticism?
I see the pen
poised, the shadow it throws,
the indents in the wooden
underbelly below the nib,
like sharkgills,
the meat eating
metaphor
ie writing instrument.

# GAVIN SELERIE

## *from* ROXY

24

We sing a code of wanting and refusing,
the pitch reinforced by plumage and shape.
So the grammarian traces
what the child knows and uses.
Romping on a swing,
flying on an uncle's outstretched arms,
we do what is later done
in a chamber with a locked door.

Orphans from parental tenderness,
we make out from an unerased blueprint,
a mother in a year of dreams
when the disc was bared
and the eye was at home in tinted mirroring.

That sweet disorder borne in a May chorus,
if our ears ever heard—
they *thought* they heard—
a break in roll and statute,
a playpower like this is tomorrow,
liquid light on a soft machine,
the spangled garden of we want it now,
honey breath for more than an instant
before possession sets in.

It was I love you in capital letters,
a rain of flowers upon our wrists,

a breeze in blonde tresses
to take the edge off tailoring.

Between the grooves some soul was alight,
a mite spinning in a locked hoard,
a self preparing for longer flight.
How is it we came through
and are not unloaded from metaphor?

32

The world lies open, a double slab.
It's still to be done, or already done,
a mildewed hoard with a cracked hinge
still holding. It's a fortress
or mortuary temple
that yet has marks which stalk
the landscape.
There's a deep blue entry
to horizontal rows,
a script which contains
only itself and more.
You could come to the same
along simple paths
perhaps, with punctuation
starting to bud.

36

From cotton fields to the catwalk
you look for the master trope
in a lexicon of fopperies.
Nobody knows what's nice or not—
it's whatever compels belonging.
Fabric gives birth to what you want.
Nitrate crumbles to dust.
The more of the moment you are
the more of the past you become.
All grammars leak: the end of the silk road
is an animal print shirt
reassuringly dear.
Leaves eaten by a worm
are the memory of a world
without memory.

46

The more you think to make
the more you mar. I broke the needle
I was sewing so hard. Slubbered up in haste
the accounts ravel out, glimmery
as a half-known part. A plural 'I'
ought to show not tell—the little you knows,
I means and sorts of that grain what's pulled
from a text. The wisp of smoke beneath flax.

Roof of a high-arched hall, ivory skies
spell spacious down to the pit,

a world as flakes of spar
shot into prisms, a blazing cresset
on embossed faces and hollows.
The plot here is ever assembling
with pitchy breath and a crystal stare.

Jack Juggler's up, a monkey clinging
to the fretwork, balcony over balcony.
It might be a jewel but this is
kitchen business—what's afloat
bellying a lag of lines; a veiny blab
to skulk and shun.

The relic you hold in your hand
is the frame through which you see,
airy, matted and so on, a peak for dazzling letters
to strike. Cloven and cracked, it's the jest-hood
for getting from self to self.

You're the only one can save—if you'd only
come with me—that is my execution—
Stop playing now—I'll be waiting
by the gate—I'm sure I could win it all back.

Lifting each door-leaf you'd start
to find a hidden head, or something
inlaid with shells.

Marked with a marginal finger
in forced about-phrases

What nobody knows

Threads a dream, juices
dust to a lazy haul

A lifetime's moments spat like foam
from a crack, or blue beams tumbling
from a cataract.

Let me remember a pair of words
upward on the decline.
For in the relation is more
the tongue that touches.

Clothed in a bundle and rolled across a marble floor.
Half choked in the burning stack. Head of a carriage,
a sphinx trundled in by slaves. River-borne,
a perfumed goddess, come to get her mate. Eyes closed,
head thrown back, a cobra feeding at the breast.

Lying on a lip sofa
I was sipping bowls of wine
profitably stuffed with pearl.
Living backward through the reckoning
I was an onion-crier
as tiles exploded from the walls.

A stopped oven gives off the fiercest fire.
My sweetheart line was two hearts
end-to-end from the middle.
Not at his beck quite always
pallid or ruby
I wanted the great whatsit—No ifs, no buts—
turned down an ocean phone call.

The earrings make the outfit
and the queues are always for mirrors.
I bought a dress for the part, but he
had it altered to be ill-fitting,
left it out in the street to fade.
I carried my shoes in a transparent "Angels" bag.
Who's in, who's out? Had the right to run wide.
Then I was a rag doll on the back of a dustcart.

# DAVID MUS

## ANDRE DU BOUCHET'S *A I R*

The one-word title, making no allusions, lacking epithets and syntactical support, calls to mind first one then another of the word's uses we already know. The fluid stuff in which we stand and move, itself standing (the stale air of this room) or moving (the wind of light airs or blustery gale): a complex substance which the experts have broken down for us into chemical components, each with a well-known character and function, all vital for human life, making up what we call the atmosphere reaching high above us towards airless space. This stuff, we know so well, close at hand or stretching into distance, carries to us the sight or those far-off mountains or of our friend across the room—carries his voice too, with the rumble of trucks on the mountain road, the smell of the roast in the kitchen or of the acrid diesel exhaust. The sum of what the air carries gives us the look, the aspect, the identity, what we call the air of the thing, close or far. Lacking that air we couldn't call anything something instead of something else; our language of differences and distinctions depends on that air or the thing, which allows us to see it and say it.

Its air wouldn't reach us unless it had room to move in and across, unless we had room to stretch gaze or hand towards it: air means too the space air fills. When we take the air we fill our lungs, striding out from imprisoning walls: the space of air is freedom to do so, as the convict knows. Deprived of air we die, as the diver knows: air is life to us, as it is to our senses and to our language. Air carries our words in another way, more expressive: air names the tune, jig or lament, to which we key our words when we sing, our steps when we dance. Often unknowing, so close is the fit: who remembers that we sing the words, "Oh say! can you see . . .?" to the air of "Anacreon to Heaven," a popular drinking song of 1812? To sing words and air we fill our lungs with air. The same air Francis Scott Key used to say what he saw, which gave him his words, carries those words from our mouths to the ears of others on the bandstand or over the airwaves, across the gap of air-filled free air which, holding us apart, brings us together.

A single stuff, sky at our level, filling the gap, bridging the distance: the air in my lungs, on my lips, before my face, bearing words, is continuous

with that far-off air bathing those mountains on the horizon, when I say mountain, air, horizon. A spacious, capacious continuity—at the same time nothing, the thin air into which the most solid form can fade, also the solid basis of whatever substantial air things have before they vanish. The word all by itself on the page—a mere nothing, "hot air"—has named all these meanings currently "in the air", without taking sides has aired them, containing them all, letting them echo and jostle, meanings suspended, "up in the air," lending each substance by turn or all together joined in its liberal flux. Our title names too this capaciousness of the word, our word, any word, which our practical use of it strives to limit, often in vain—affirms the word's ancient stubborn freedom, its air of doing very well without us and our painstaking distinctions. We know very well it was there before us and will outlast our last breath.

Before us, after us, and beyond us. . . The word like the stuff it names raises up the ancient and the new, the intimate in our lungs, to touch the highest rim of sky, that "wild blue yonder" of the old Air Force hymn, when to be "airborne" was still an epic risk, an Odyssey, akin to that launched by Homer's "wingèd words." Air belongs to the oldest elemental level in our speech, and speaks for it almost unchanged, AER in Latin, younger brother of venerable Greek AHP. The Greek word may recall that for Homer it meant murk, moist thick earthbound stuff, carefully marked off from the luminous upper air, the ether, almost indeed, simply, darkness. Or that for the philosopher Anaximenes it meant the basic all-embracing material of which the cosmos was made—if divine, if eternal, still the stuff of our individual souls, even a soul itself. "Just as our soul, being air, holds us together, so do breath and air encompass the whole world," making up the very soul of song, we might add, thinking of poetry and the poem before us.

What has this poem to add? Is there a sign that its originality brings these old meanings together in a new way, yielding a substantial new meaning? I wrote the Greek word in Greek capitals, AHP, but the Latin AER like our present A I R uses Roman. Our page, our lettering, have an emphatically Roman air, explicitly archaic—not speaking, as they might, in uncial, Carolingian minuscule, italic or modern cursive. . . Like the inscription cut in white marble facing on the Roman wall: bald block letters, telling us what the wall is, who built it and why. Naming their material support too, as if we read STONE: the letters of a Roman inscription, carved into the stone, sometimes filled with bronze, were most often left empty, filled with stony air. This page with its inscription is one we know well, a far cry from the Greek page—a wax tablet—from the Hebrew or the Chinese scroll. A page in Roman: so little on it besides white light; the page largely bare, empty wall, says itself more fully, throwing a dazzling light on its strength.

An old page: but our title on its page has an original look. Just as the word's original meanings have been aired in an original way—pointing to their one origin, an all-embracing cohesive substantial fluidity—so our three ancient letters have been joined in a new way. At the author's bidding the typographer has highlighted the letters, spelling them out, adding extra room for them to move and breath in. Extra inner room: the fresh air between them now, like air in lungs supporting spoken words, is the same air bracing the letters from above, below, beyond and behind, separating them out, binding them in, on the page, with the page. As we can now see.

For these letters are in the page, pointing to the air it has, the area it opens upwards towards us; for our look falls through a depth of air which allows us to meet the look of the letters. The same depth surrounds the book and our hands holding it: the page area is not cut off from our air and its life, but bathes in it as we do, its word of a piece with us in our fluid medium. This is surely the stand our title takes. Our *area*—straight Latin—is the French *aire*, identical twin of the poem's proper name, sounding the same, consonant in meaning. As if for us STONE sounded and looked just like WALL, the *one* of the one consonant with the *all* of the other. . . Air is never empty if it bears light and dark through space in depth; light borne enters the letters and our eyes the way air penetrates our lungs charged with giving it back, laden now with the same letters pronounced, fitted to their cadence. Our word gives the matter—we say the subject matter—of the poem it titles, subject, matter, poem we glimpse already through and between the ancient letters made new. The pages of A I R will lead us through themselves on roads of light and air to far reaches they open, which may have no meaning more forceful than that of our passage there. Our title names, in the same breath, the book before us, its mode and genre: an air to which the words we read must be fitted, otherwise the whole aria will not sing and be sung in key. Matter and mode, subject and song, the air of A I R—opening up the new, if rightly read, right to its ancient origin. As you'll see.

# ANDRE DU BOUCHET

## *from* A I R

*(Tr. from the French*
*by David Mus)*

### BREATH LOG

The incandescent
point sears
the whole length of cord

daylight goes down with wind

as caged fire

everything I own
reaches me

heavily

being

earth

for laughter.

N.B. André du Bouchet has published four separate books entitled A I R, with interlocking contents, all work from the early fifties. Here are selections translated from the third of these and the most substantial, published in 1977 by Clivages (Paris).

Not one step will I draw nearer blinding day
in person.

## MORNING

Up to the elbows in the ivy.

Face on, sky-deep fissures in the earth crust where a window throbs. Through the cleft of mountain drapery, the gleaming pediment, day thrust back beneath the windswept overhang.

On land, late life, the wood in ashes among light peelings, paperthin.

Eyerise.

# DICTATION

You must perhaps make yourself
follow such dictation. But nothing
makes me. Outside indifferent.
Wind allows it.

I

Cold breathings stamp down air. Night once more rolls
round. My route starts out again into snow. You appear,
when I turn my head, like a wild, a hopeful thing.

2

Fire
on the snowy flank, or windowpane.

3

Walking out—as speaking out—ceaseless. Without
getting one step farther.

4

The cloud covers the road with a black cloud, black
breath at the winter's gate.

I keep my head above earth filled with bits of
animals and stones.

5

The harness slipping over earth's shoulder. Two flails, chains gone cold.

Wherever I stretch out to dry earth appears.

Not a single completed being, rather it is something that breathes. What you hear is its breathing. You see all its workings. The stones bare as the trees. As earth.

6

Night I spend on earth

with these words which lie cold awaiting, it may be, breath's dawning.

7

As I set out
I am read. Several times I've been earth, several times like a word.

8

Reddening rim. Biting edge of air. Even colder is what I am following.

9

Lowly earth, speaking in a low voice, turns me into earth.

10

Backing on air

with the clean plates

all about
where the air has finished.

11

Shaken
by the hand
of day

I breathe in its stead

unwinding
this cold road

outside

down to earth

it is
no fire of mine
rather another heat

that sky

where we are locked.

12

The chill is the chill of the room surrounding gold when
I've lightened up.

## I CAN SEE NEXT TO NOTHING

The paper I cut through
is damp
the mountain near hidden by its white robe

the words calm down
reseating themselves
in place

air even warmer than the skin

at last I emerge

not me carving these streets

so fully is it all existing
so far stretching
I may let my hand go

outside

I can see next to nothing.

# GARY SNYDER

## LANGUAGE GOES TWO WAYS

Language, in the Occident, has been popularly described as that by which humans bring order to the "chaos of the world." In this view, human intelligence flowers through the supposedly unique faculty of language, and then imposes a net of categories on an untidy universe. The more objective and rational the language, it is thought, the more accurate this exercise in defining the world will be. Language is considered by some to be a flawed mathematics, and the idea that mathematics might even supplant language has been flirted with. This view still colors the commonplace thinking of many engineer-types and possibly some mathematicians and scientists.

The world—ordered according to its own inscrutable mode (indeed a sort of chaos) is so complex and vast in macro and micro scales that it remains forever unpredictable. The weather for hoary example. And take the very mind that ponders these thoughts: in spite of years of personhood we remain unpredictable even to our own selves. Often we couldn't guess what our next thought will be. But that clearly does not mean we are living in hopeless confusion, only that we live in a realm in which many patterns remain mysterious or inaccessible to us.

We can affirm that the natural world (which includes human languages) is mannerly, shapely, coherent, and patterned according to its own devices. The four thousand or so languages of the world model reality each in their own way (following Whorfian theories of the deep effects of each language on world-view)—with patterns and syntaxes that were not invented or created by anyone. Languages are naturally evolved wild systems whose complexity eludes the descriptive attempts of the rational mind.

"Wild" alludes to a process of self-organization that generates systems and organisms, all of which are within the constraints of—and constitute components of—larger systems which again are wild, such as major ecosystems, or the water-cycle in the biosphere. Wildness can be said to be the essential nature of nature. As reflected in consciousness it can be seen as a kind of open awareness—full of imagination but also the source of alert survival intelligence. The workings of the human mind at its very

richest reflect this essential wildness. I have gone into this in more detail in the essays in my book *The Practice of the Wild.*

Language goes two ways: it enables us to have a small window onto an independently existing world, but it also shapes—via its very structures and vocabularies—how we see that world. It may be argued that what language does to our seeing of reality is restrictive, narrowing, limiting, and possibly misleading. "The menu is not the meal." But rather than dismiss language and to vaguely speak of Unsayable Truths, we must turn right back into language. The way to see with language, to be free with it and to find it a vehicle of self-transcending insight, is to know both mind and language extremely well, and to play with their many possibilities without any special attachment. In doing this, a language yields up surprises and angles that amaze us, and can lead back to unmediated direct experience. Creativity is not something from outside that a poet brings to language, but is a function of a double sort of reading, and a hidden or unnoticed pattern in the world may show itself through deeps of language.

Natural Language, self-generated grammars and vocabularies constructed in the confusion of history, expresses itself in the vernaculars. Daily usage has many striking, clear, specific, usages and figures of speech that come through (traditionally) in riddles, proverbs, stories and such—and nowadays in jokes, raps, wildly fluid slang and constant experiment with playful expressions—the dozens, the snaps. Children on the playground chant rhymes, and enjoy fooling with language. Maybe some people are born with a talent for language, just as some people are born with a talent for math or music. Some natural geniuses go beyond being street singers, mythographers, and raconteurs to become fully engaged poets and writers of multicultural America.

Creativity is a matter of seeing afresh what is already there and reading its implications and omens.* There are poems, novels, and paintings that roll onward through history, perennially redefining our places in the cosmos, that were initiated by such seeing. But creativity is not a unique, singular, godlike act of "making something." It is born of being deeply immersed in what *is*—and then seeing the overlooked connections, tensions, resonances, shadows, reversals, retellings. What comes forth is "new."

"Good language usage" was an idea that used to be based on the perceived utility of the speech of people of power and position—whose standard language was that of the capital—London or Washington—and the social and economic advantages that accrue to its use. Garden-variety ideas of Good Writing are drawn from models in literature and high artistic culture. A third category involves a technical sort of writing that is mainly

*Stephen Owens' *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics* speaks to this point.

concerned with clarity and organization and is rightly perceived as an essential element in the tool kit of a person hoping for success in the modern world. This last sort of writing is intrinsically boring, but it has the usefulness of a tractor which will go straight and steady up one row and down another. Like a tractor, it is expected to produce a yield: scholarly essays and dissertations, grant proposals, charges or countercharges, final reports, long-range scenarios, strategic plans.

*Really Good Writing* comes to those who have learned, mastered, and passed through conventional good usage, good writing, and then loop back to the enjoyment and unencumbered playfulness of Natural Language. Good Writing is like a garden that is producing exactly what you want, by virtue of lots of weeding and cultivating. What you get is what you plant, like a row of beans. *Really* good writing is both inside and outside the garden fence. It can be a few beans, but also some wild poppies, vetches, mariposa lilies, ceanothus, and some juncoes and yellowjackets thrown in. It is more diverse, more interesting, more unpredictable, and engages with a much broader, deeper kind of intelligence. Its connection to the wildness of language and imagination helps give it power.

This is what Thoreau meant by the term "Tawny Grammar"—as he wrote (in the essay "Walking") of "this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society". . ."The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and dusky knowledge, *Gramatica parda,* tawny grammar, a kind of mother-wit derived from that same leopard to which I have referred." The grammar of not only language, but that of culture and civilization itself, comes from this vast mother of ours, Nature. "Savage and howling" is another way of saying "graceful dancer" and "fine writer." (Another linguist friend once commented "Language is like a Mother Nature of feeling, it's so powerfully ordered there's room to be 99% wild.")

We can and must teach our young people to master the expected standard writing procedures, as part of preparation for the demands of the economy of GATT, and information overload. They will need these skills not only to advance in this post-industrial pre-collapse world, but to critique and transform it. Those young learners with charming naive writing talents may suffer from the destructive effect of this discipline, because they will be brought to doubt their own ear and wit. They need to be assured that their unique personal visions will survive. They can take a deep breath and leap into the current formalities and rules, learn the game, and still come home to the language of heart and 'hood. We must continually remind people that language and its powers are far vaster than the territory deemed "proper usage" at any given time and place, and that there have always been geniuses of language who wrote without formal education.

Homer was a singer, not a writer.

The more familiar view of language is:

1. Language is uniquely human, and primarily cultural.
2. Intelligence is framed and developed by language.
3. The world is chaotic, but language organizes and civilizes it.
4. The more cultivated the language, the more educated and precise and clear, the better it will tame the unruly world of nature and feeling.
5. Good writing is "civilized" language.

One can turn this around to say:

1. Language is basically biological, but becomes semi-cultural as learned and practised.
2. Intelligence is framed and developed by all kinds of interactions with the world, including human communication both linguistic and nonlinguistic, and language comes to play a strong—but not the only—role in the refinement of thinking.
3. The world (and mind) is orderly in its own fashion, and linguistic order reflects and condenses that order.
4. The more completely (without the interference of ego and opinion) the world is allowed to come forward and instruct us, the better we can see our place in the interconnected world of nature.
5. Good writing is "wild" language.

The 12th-century Zen Buddhist philosopher Dôgen put it this way: "To advance your own experience onto the world of phenomena is delusion. When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, is enlightenment." To see a thrush in a bush, call it "thrush" and go on walking, is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see the bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then recall "thrush;" is to have enjoyed a larger moment with the world.

•

When we are in the act of playful writing, the mind's eye is roaming, seeing sights and scenes, reliving events, hearing and dreaming at the same time. The mind may be reliving a past moment entirely in this moment, so that it is hard to say if the mind is in the past or in some other present. We move mentally as in a great landscape, and return from it with a few bones, nuts, or drupes, which we keep as language. We write to deeply heard but distant rhythm; out of a fruitful darkness; out of a moment without

judgment or object. Language is a part of our body, and woven into the seeing, feeling, touching, and dreaming of the whole mind as much as coming from some localized "language-center." Full of the senses, as—

> Sabrina fair
> Listen where thou art sitting
> Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of lilies knitting
> The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
> Listen for dear honor's sake,
> Goddess of the silver lake,
> Listen and save.

(a song in Milton's *Comus).* Chill clarity, fluid goddess, silvery waves and silvery flowers.

The faintly visible traces of the world are to be trusted. We do not need to organize so-called chaos. Discipline and freedom are not opposed to each other. We are made free by the training that enables us to master necessity, and we are made disciplined by our free choice to undertake mastery. We go beyond being a "master" of a situation by becoming a friend of "necessity" and thus—as Camus would have put it—neither victim nor executioner. Just a person playing in the field of the world.

## POWETRY

Three political stances in poetry—this is what the combination of Charles Bernstein, Kamau Brathwaite, and Norma Cole offers (whom I shall briefly and alphabetically consider). All would be discussable as examples of a concern, which I very much favor, taken from Adorno. "Poetry is now possible only if language is thoroughly plowed up and turned over. . ." (Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, volume 2, Columbia University Press, 1992, 195; the essay called "Charmed Language," 1967.) In the context of Adorno's discussion, this is a rejection of the purely subjective, the neoromantic. The desire of the poet under his scrutiny (Rudolf Borchardt) was "to force the transsubjective, objectively binding quality of language" into a new sound, not archaic, not romantic, not laden with the museum of the poetic. In part, this sound comes from a rhetoric of speech, of speech considered as a kind of eloquent riff, a social ode. In part, the political elements can come from drawing energy from the conflictual antagonisms which one's personal and historical situation embody (this paraphrasing Adorno). In part, and don't misunderstand, the embodying of a political position in language comes from a rage so joyous and slashing that it has a comedic or voracious undertow, no matter the catalogue of superabundance, desolation, or injustice that the poetry offers. Thus—the plowing up and turning over of language—down to the social text embodied in every syllable—seems crucial to that poetry of political address which one feels as enriching. As adequate.

Charles Bernstein, *Dark City*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1994; $11.95. Thirteen long poems (ranging from eight to about twenty pages). Of verve and address, ventriloquizing, mimicking, shticking it to them and us. The work extends the range and meaning of the poetic act. (It's also really and somewhat relentlessly funny. That is, it has entirely erased any tinge or twinge of the High Seriousness of Poetry. It also continuously enacts its own undercutting. Some people might, therefore, be annoyed; it's not an

aspect of this work that is always easy to live with.) This manner, or poetic position, like a magician, produces incredible quick-footed shape-changing tap-dancing urban-trickster SHIFTS among sounds and statements. Segmented words; in your face line breaks; "exogamic structure"; transegmental drift; juggled proverbs; DOS system talk; assonance, consonance, nons(on)ense; a bunch of stuff a four year old typed onto the page and pressed save; glissades in perfect hypotaxis; a noble rhetoric of car salesmen, computer jocks, letters to the editor, snooze-riot book reviews, zany-brainy double talk, jingles, doggerels, things that (as in Stein) sound like other things, but not quite, and "summary / mummery" (53). And passages of—advertising propane; familial sniveling; punning apprehension of banality; delivery systems of "poetry services" (22)—the whole lot. Like Jacob with the angel, Bernstein has wrestled Bakhtin to the ground; our favorite Russian won't say another WORD about "monologic poetry"—he promises.

All in all, Bernstein's work creates the poetry archive of daily life, "confining / masquerade / to detail," and detail to everywhere. (71) Poetry becomes the spread sheet of the linguistic detail. There are undulating sentences, there is ululating parody, nothing is sacred, ok, except language processes and their socioeconomic provocation and ground. The work explores the textures and social vectors of the sounds made in the name of writing, speaking, talking, professing, selling, thinking. Hoo hoo hoo Meestr Keetzel, so there's your Zukofsky, there's your Swinburne, your Browning, your Stevens, your Shakespeare, your Groucho, who else d'ya expect? Maybe, say, the ambition of Pound, and the music hall rakishness of early to mid Eliot. Invoking both those names puts a lot of stake in trumping the modernists of heavy master narratives and exclusionary clauses. Bernstein does Jewish-creole poetry vaudeville; "aside the jesting hooligan, shenanigan, or / general call to bedlam" (143) in the myriad discourses of the mix. Motto: if there's a sound, I can make it. Or—if I can't find that passage from Hegel, I'll write one just like it. Performativity—it's the Keyword for Now, and this book's got it. "But / why prize distraction over direction, song over / solemnity?" (64) For the intelligence and cunning of the examination, the range and the hilarity; for the political commitment to the "ploughing up and turning over of language."

Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*. New York: New Directions, 1993. $9.95. Fourteen medium length poems inciting, constructing, and performing a diasporic culture which rounds Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, and the African-American United States into an interactive network of allusions and meanings—musicians, political figures, martyrs. The title, alluding to the forced transport of Africans into enslavement, now is remade to indicate passages (literary and geographic) through a

"middle"—a particular historical moment in which "dat POR CYAAAN TEK NO MOOR." (51) I haven't offered, except with the capital letters here, a sense of the manifesto-like play with typeface, font-size and page that this work (and another—the remarkable *Trench Town Rock)* offer, whose poetics might be spoken as "see see see until yu bline." (TTR 67). *(Trench Town Rock.* Providence: Lost Roads, 1994. $10.95) No more / no Moor—no more outside constructions or representations of the colored. With this turn, and with the intransigence of that rejection, Brathwaite is the first poet of a new world.

This is a vibrant work of linguistic and political cunning, of power and rage/range. Brathwaite enters into the fibers of language with notable semantic, etymological and intertextual images. With a Joycean flair, he doubles and triples the languages in his grasp, with scalpel and needling precision undoing and anatomizing commonplaces. In a parody of white attitudes finding the "manacles" in their concept of "man" (16): "there are tribes there of scarececrows / hunters of heads who ate humane bones." (15) Virtually every line of this pulsing poetry contains subtle allusions to events, attitudes, ideologies of the racialized world and the political struggles of transformation.

> but that worse it is the blink
> in iani own eye. the sun blott. ed out by
> paper a cane fires vamp.
>
> ires a ink wheels emp.
> ires a status quo status quo status crows
> that tell a blood tale toll/ing in the ghetto
>
> (50)

Ire and dies irae are shadow words contained in the splitting of vamp/ires and emp/ires, these linked by their abilities to suck blood and to drain the victim. (And, alas, in both legend and fact, to make colonized into colonizer, to make vamped into vampire. Brathwaite does not overlook Fanon's and Memmi's dialectics, but it is not his main point.) The status quo "crows" or lords over; it also eats carrion, as do crows. This tale, as in Donne, tolls for thee. In short; by the knowing and narrow-eyed use of multiplex literary and cultural allusions, puns, overlayerings of word over word, suggestive associations, metonymic leads across a field, Brathwaite's social meanings are embedded in the segmentation and articulation of words themselves. It is political poetry in the very fibers of language, and achieved by the "ploughing up" of languages—indeed, if this not be misunderstood, by the making of these plowshares into rapiers. This is a very significant and productive post-colonial poetry in English, the equal

of Aimé Césaire's magisterial "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (which, in the Eshleman/Smith translation, New Directions will be issuing soon). New Directions has embarked on an ambitious and helpful publishing program to bring Brathwaite's works to the attention of a United States audience. In Fall 1995, they will bring out *Ancestors*, the second, and highly-acclaimed, trilogy, originally published between 1977 and 1987, and whose individual titles are *Mother Poem, Sun Poem,* and *X/Self. Black & Blues* (1976) follows in Spring 1996 and thereafter Brathwaite's first trilogy, *The Arrivants.*

Norma Cole, *Mars,* Berkeley: Listening Chamber, 1994. $10. With an original cover by Jess. Six long works, seemingly shifting in attention from the cultural associations of Mars, Mercury, Saturn to the Old Testament Ruth. The work is announced as having been begun (February 1991) under the pall, or in the aura of the Gulf War. War is announced tangentially as an issue in the epigrams, one from Duncan and the other from H.D., both alluding to the career-long, central consideration of military violence in those two oeuvres. But what the work proposes is a set of thoughtful, but very fragmented notations, inside a theater in consciousness, or on a sketch pad of responses. The stage is thick with dreams and fantasies, with the shards of philosophical matter (such as a reading of Levinas). The general tone or stance seems to be a sustained bafflement, a holding open of a door of naming because there is a plethora of evidence, but, in some sense, the "case" or "suit" to which the evidence points is obscured. "The vaudevillian character runs downstairs and comes back up wearing different clothes, whereupon the person on the landing realizes she has not the set of assumptions with which to understand her role in all this." (10) The language fragments and notations are each quite precise and convincing, but the binding energy I cannot find. This may simply be that the work is not written under the rubric of the slashing, "comedic" (that is mordant, sardonic, judgmental) political sound that I outlined above. It may be a function of the subject's questioning of "her role in all this." In any event, the pun between lead (the metal) and lead (the action) is important to the sense of depression, stasis, and examination of cultural response to (for example) "the hyperabstraction of the official media representation of the Gulf war" (72). This is a reactive, not a proactive text. Lead is a metal for bullets; a lead is a prominent news story; it is an electrical conductor; it is a thick strip of white created between lines of type; it is a plumb bob for a sounding.

lead lines on the hill

lead hands
heat-seeking

there is no metaphor for war

(43)

The Mercury section, for example ends, in a kind of wary suspicion "no messenger // that there could be no / messenger[.]" (45) This, of course, is a judgment on the work of both Duncan and H.D. in which messengers abide no matter what the historical distress. The poet insists that we are "all widows" now, and the book's overarching tone is a bereavement (83). It could be said—a bereavement for some of the individual subjectivities possible under the political conditions created by a flailing imperium.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

## "only in the heart the glitter": A Review of Kenneth Irby's *Call Steps: Plains, Camps, Stations, Consistories.* Station Hill / Tansy: Barrytown, 1994.

I have carried Ken Irby's words for years like images of the Stations of the Cross, mixed with memories that cling to his words until word and memory become inseparable, like my vision of the pack of Forest Service horses rolling on their back in Snake River country "to sustain the dead"—in Irby's phrase from *A Set*—or the doves who nestle in my backyard magnolia recalling the delicacy of *Orexis* and "the generation of mourning doves' cries / . . .from the twilight in the mind / releasing and attracting us" (Call Steps 19). Or wasps flitting above the cottonwood, rattle of a paint spray can, smells from the kitchen, the enduring and irredeemable sadness of time in the coming of winter. I received *Call Steps* in the midst of my first Indiana harvest—with my head full of scenes of violence upon the fields of corn and soy, the machines of Tartaros churning at night, and the flatness

of the land no longer veiled by the corn, now scarcely interrupted by silos and granaries and the few windbreaks severing the enormous distances. This is a landscape that evokes for me the Great Wheel of the Kansas Plains of Irby's work with its vast yearning and intimations of another life. Along the Demeter granary in Fowler grain spews out on the highway and flocks of birds startle and whirl from the shoulder as you pass, and I think of Irby's own sacramental birds, when feeding becomes a central image of something akin to grace:

> *confer* the birdbath flock below
> or a tallow sponge for stone for bread?
> *in fact,* a birdseed ball, pecked through
>
> (148)

—but I also recognize the fecund ambiguity, the admixture of grace and loss, with only the strings of the gutseed ball left dangling.

Perhaps there's no better expression of Irby's dark faith than the disappearance throughout *Orexis,* the first book of *Call Steps:*

> but it does not remain to the eyes
> or even, since there may be no other name, at all
> and yet remains
>
> (26)

In my mind, Irby remains one of the essential visionary and religious poets of my time, with his Gnostic madness and nonsense and paradoxes combined with—above all—a most remarkable generosity of spirit, accumulating natural faces and allusion and funky down-home jazz riffs in order that nothing be lost, except what is inevitable in the recalcitrance of body and spirit, in the inevitable processes of deterioration and erosion that are cause for remorse and celebration, as when he himself celebrates "all sorts of kindness and generosity" with a lovely, if homespun, image of loss and grace: "deep, *unbearable* affection? except for *dis*tance / wearing the new red shirt you sent rubs off on my underwear" (66).

Not all Irby's work is easily accessible; in fact, most of it remains mysterious, half-seen, half-heard, buzzing like the drone of a mountain dulcimer or a didgeridoo, recalling the dream-time. Or like Osip Mandelstam's quotations humming like cicadas. Reading his work requires, I think, a form of initiation, just as the poems are deeply concerned with initiation, drawing upon spiritual sources from the *Zohar* to his remarkable Masonic and Templar allegories to Sufi dialectics of love, "homegrown handtipped dervishwhirling in you own living room without getting dizzy or sick." (53) Yet they *are* dizzying, improvisations that are remarkable for their fluidity

and their technique, their range of sound from nonsense squawks and groans to deep mellow exquisitely painful melodic lines. Cross Rilke with Ben Webster and Huckleberry Finn and you'd arrive at Irby's music, a pastoral music that feeds, even if in the *sparagmos* of the carnal body: "parsley // pubic hair above the bread / body torn to pieces . . ." (20). Yet the poems' syncretic and esoteric nature do not deny their democratic and generous spirit, open to the common speech, the Gawdawmightys and aintchas and pogo sticks and "naw, nix, nothin' up yet, knucks down, dinks, but eyes, you got mine, swinging" (142). And I think of Charles Olson's *polis,* where "polis / is / eyes."

*Call Steps* is formed of three books, *Orexis; Cicada Woods,* composed generally of mysterious minimal annunciations; and *Bowls,* a work which seems an homage to Duncan and H.D. and the body spiritual which contains one of the most intriguing glimpses of Irby's poetics when he sings: *"to stand with the things of Nature* already down a separate road from the things of Nature / [. . .] 'so the lines . . . / do not meet"' (146). All were written in the late seventies, and gather poems published in rare editions and scattered in journals. His previous large collection, *Catalpa,* is to my mind one of the essential texts of contemporary American poetry, exploring and amplifying the physical, spiritual and historical terrain associated with Robert Duncan's mythopoeisis and Olson's *'istorin,* as well as Louis Zukofsky's musical and syntactical experiments (many of Irby's "Études," in their odd and resonant couplings and broken syntax, recall movements of *"A",* such as his "homage to Sosatsu's *Bugaku"*: "ode all the uprights O'd / outsping, unbowed // & ear lobe told / just hold to be" (91). In many ways, *Catalpa* plumbs the great cycles and errancies of history, with its charting of Jedidiah Smith and California rifts and trails and John Brown's border crossings as they intersect with dreams and visions. But here Irby compels the local and intimate landscape to reveal its truths, offering a measure of survival at the margins, where poetry reveals the necessity and splendor of leftovers and herb gardens and "cold jug chablis," the alchemy of using all the parts of the chicken until reaching the "deep muted underglow, to reflect the soul's turn's own reflection / back into the days, wet, dark, up-welling, mid-November" (147) Even in the midst of such darkness, Irby can no doubt lead you to what remains of the Manitou circling the prairies or whisper the passwords of the Knights of the Rosy Cross. From darkness, such bounty.

Though there is a certain virtue in searching out-of-the-way places for treasures, just as alchemists searched the dunghill for the *lapis philosophorum*—I recall constructing Irby's works piecemeal, searching through old *Caterpillar* volumes and new magazines, eagerly anticipating finding works whose names were enticing, like *In Excelsis Borealis* and *Orexis* and *Catalpa,* a tree forever associated in my mind with Irby, just as

lilacs are with Whitman—the collection in *Call Steps* should be celebrated and propagated, even if the work remains finally misunderstood, "every bit of it in a tongue nobody understands" (132), a misunderstanding that binds us to each other in rites of absence, as when in *Orexis* Irby proclaims:

> so that the word is passed on
> and equally not known
> till how much later, the thrill of recognizing can still be known
> (27)

And indeed the mysteries of Irby's work often arise later in crystalline epiphanies, the upsurge of involuntary memory to fully recall the pain, always the pain, even in the midst of celebration, as in the revelations of an attic bare in winter and his yearning gaze in the cardinal directions: "looking out West and North, toward the river, the hills on the other side of the flood plain brighter than anything else in the day, snow dark the woods—and watch till the aftersunset glow had vanished and the room was dark, the earth turn" (74). And in sorrow one finds a redemptive flame: "tears, for a lodge of sorrow, seeds, or grif for, for that long house / and smoke of memory, history's time afire" (134).

—EDWARD SCHELB

## NOTICINGS

*Chaim Soutine,* Catalogue Raisonné (with essays by Maurice Tuchman and Esti Dunow), boxed, two volumes, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, Köln. Nearly 500 paintings, many reproduced for the first time (with a significant number of fakes weeded out), large format, excellent color work. Asked to identify his key influences, De Kooning once replied: "I think I would choose Soutine. . . I've always been crazy about Soutine—all of his paintings. Maybe its the lushness of the paint. He builds up a surface that looks like a material, like a substance. There's a kind of transfiguration, a certain fleshiness, in his work. . . I remember when I first saw the Soutines in the

Barnes Collection. . . the Matisses had a light of their own, but the Soutines had a glow that came from within the paintings—it was another kind of light."

*Emily Dickinson,* Joan Kirkby, Macmillan Education Ltd., England. A brief but engaging "introduction" to Dickinson by an Australian scholar, with compelling re-readings of such poems as "Because I could not stop for Death" and "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun."

*Index on Censorship #6,* Writers and Scholars International Ltd., London. The current issue of this valuable journal includes a powerful address by Wole Soyinka on the "end of Nigerian history," and articles on Iraq, Cuba, and Haiti with information I have not spotted elsewhere.

*Queen of Terrors,* Robert Kelly, McPherson & Co. As serious as his poetry, but much more playful, Kelly's "fictions" are not his poems redone as prose (as might be a risk at 60). Writing performed in the paradise of the imagination, thinking its way, micron by micron, through what might be thought of as the sleeves of the language's availabilities. Later this year, Black Sparrow will bring out his selected poems, *Red Actions.*

*The Green Lake is Awake,* Selected Poems, Joseph Ceravolo, Coffee House Press. The surface excitement of Ceravolo's writing is special; his poems often "go off" like a popper exploding popcorn. Below the surface, there are many clutches of questions ("What time are animals?" "Where would my dog be if I had one?" "The path, the path is where?" "You going where in leaves?"), that fall somewhere between "koans" and maddening 4-year-old questions. Zukofsky's *Catullus* kept echoing while I read.

*I, Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala,* Verso. Should be required reading for all American high-school seniors. Upon finishing it, I turned to Victor Perera's *Unfinished Conquest* (U of Cal Press), a solidly-researched, fair-minded and compassionate overview of "the Guatemala tragedy," in which North America is insidiously involved. In his "Bibliography" (a discussion of his sources as well as a checklist), Perera points out that Marc Zimmerman and David Stoll have written on inconsistencies in some of Menchú's eyewitness accounts. He then comments: "Although her book should be as subject to objective scrutiny as any other published account, the force of Menchú's intelligence and personal integrity, and her almost miraculous survival, render her testimony unique and, to an extent, impervious to critical analysis."

*The Origin of Humankind,* Richard Leakey, Basic Books. A bland but informative survey of humankind from Australopithecus to Cro-Magnon. As the picture fills in, the gaps also become more noticeable. The connections between tools, brain increase, meat-eating, tooth and jaw structure, curtailed fetal gestation and neoteny are factors in a time frame (7 million BCE to 35,000 BCE) that still appears to be unmappable. Useful bibliography.

*Worshipful Company of Fletchers,* James Tate, The Ecco Press. Noticing in the Winter 1995 *Daedalus* catalogue that Tate's book had received the 1994 NBA, I picked up a copy of it, and noticed that the book was published in 1994. I thought book awards were given the year *following* publication. That aside, the book is terrible. Tate is an eternal adolescent saying things that are supposed to be funny that renga on and on, derailing punch lines to keep the silliness going. It is a writing that doesn't believe in anything but which, instead of confronting its cynicism, makes faces, in effect, at the reader. One poem begins: "She has one good bumblebee / which she leads about town / on a leash of clover." This tells us that Tate heard the story about Gérard de Nerval, during a breakdown preceding suicide, leading a lobster down the street on a ribbon. The extent of the trivialization here is typical of the entire book.

*And For Example,* Ann Lauterbach, Penguin Books. Lauterbach writes out of a threshold area, that location some call the human aura, where living warmth vanishes as the world takes over. Which is to say that her work is not really inward nor outward. I feel that she dwells in this space too self-permissively, yet I have to acknowledge that word by word, phrase by phrase, her poetry is meticulous. Poems often have a pale, Tiffany-like glow, and yearn *toward* or *into,* without revelation or, for that matter, blood.

*When the Borders Bleed: The Struggle Of The Kurds,* photographs by Ed Kashi, introduction by Christopher Hitchens, Pantheon. An informative essay as to who the Kurds are by the *Nation* columnist prefaces 100 or so color photographs of this grievously exploited people—20 million without a nation of their own—who recently endured genocidal campaigns waged against them by Saddam Hussein. As one who became aware of the Kurds' plight during our so-called Gulf War, I am glad to have this book as a way to keep these people on my mind.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

## *Columns & Catalogues,* Peter Schjeldahl, Great Barrington, The Figures, 1994

In conversation with Peter Schjeldahl at Brown University last year, I proposed that his art writing revealed a strong bias toward Neo-expressionism, and he immediately agreed. Not the only way to appreciate his temperament; nonetheless, much could be gained about this street-smart New York School poet's viewpoint by reading his art writing with this in mind.

Neo-expressionism may be seen as the triangulation of expressionist with populist impulses. Following German Expressionism, it assumes that civility in art is false, or at least uninteresting; at any rate, creative talent is rather more anarchic than this and will show itself in awkward, antisocial and adolescent excesses sooner than it will colonize the already known. Schjeldahl will support the art that arises from the undermining of civility, no matter what the medium, although he is especially susceptible to painting and to spectacle.

The exemplar of the latter category for Schjeldahl—as for many of us—is Bruce Nauman, the dialectician in neon whose verbal art has recently given way to videos of "Clown in Tantrum" and other high-decibel absurdity. Everywhere in Schjeldahl's writings but here too in this book of recent art reviews from *The Village Voice,* Nauman heads a cast of theatrical artists that includes Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, and Nayland Blake, whose installation devoted to the mentality of the Marquis de Sade poses the threat of total freedom; or, as Schjeldahl puts it: "if absolutely free to do what you want, what will you want to do?" Schjeldahl has high regard for art that brings such questions to crisis. In his ambivalence, he therefore reveres the charismatic figure of Joseph Beuys.

In painting, the populist in Schjeldahl is repelled by theory and attracted to intuitive intelligence. Ree Morton and Carroll Dunham are favored Neo-expressionists compatible with Philip Guston in his last phase. Art proves itself through its acts, not its beliefs, Schjeldahl seems to advocate. So it's not surprising that Joan Mitchell's rough-and-ready Abstract Expressionism, and especially the art of "the patriarchs" Willem de Kooning and Jean Dubuffet, get pride of place in Schjeldahl's pantheon. On the other hand, Lucien Freud, the terminally reactionary pictorial painter of world-weary penises, gets appropriate disengagement: "A lot of people need Lucien Freud to be a great painter," Schjeldahl's review begins. Although with Eric Fischl, Schjeldahl can be beguiled by the same distracting subject matter—dazzled as he is by Bad Boyism, this time he is not fooled. Indeed, he is rarely fooled.

—MARJORIE WELISH

## Jay Meek. *Windows.* Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1994. 64 pp. No price given.

Profound awareness of time and a Platonic idealism have characterized Jay Meek's poetry for the last decade. As one poem in *Earthly Purposes* (1984) begins, "The dead are with me tonight and I am richer for it." But richer or poorer, to swim with time is to discriminate and to modulate, both exceedingly difficult acts:

> All things in coming to us blaze with such a multiple light
> and often so powerfully
> that we ache to make them simple, or to hold a simple view,
> but there is comfort
> and at times joy in knowing that even among familiar things
> distinctions can exist
> and lend new meaning. . . .
>
> ("Winners")

The biologist's rats, the physicist's sun, the poet's words come round and round as bedevilment, the ever-present insistence by things outside us that we make our reality congruent with theirs, in response to which the poet says in *Stations* (1989):

> I want nothing more
>
> than to live with the complexities that form
> a landscape each of us helps make,
> seeing and being seen,
>
> our best powers no more than what we'll need
> to live out the century with clarity
> and mindfulness.
>
> ("Student Boats at the Sailing Pavilion")

The appealing modesty scarcely masks the courage with which the poet takes on himself and his language the whole job of cultural definition, preservation and transmission. "We move toward ourselves," he says, "between necessary mirrors," wishing to find some way to carry our lives, wondering when we'll begin to think of life passing in the third person, observing the other lives we die short of. Classically grand and contempo-

rarily puny is the ironic measure of human life: "Everyone who drinks the water dies."

In *Windows,* the old room with a view onto the mud flats of the Charles becomes three correlative sections each of a dozen story-poems, concentrated anecdotes in which, as in all experimental verification, the phrased moments are cemented by underlying metaphor and characterized by cogent rhythm, striking imagery, dense expression and lyric tensions and impact. Invented in 18th-century France to translate classic verse into non-tonic French and to get around Academic rigidity, the prose poem soon became a means to express original consciousness first for Bertrand and Guérin, then for Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, for De Quincey and Novalis, Turgenev and Rilke—and on to our own time of "poetry talk" and "performance art." Meek reinvigorates the prose poem proper—that complex verbal play between the conscious and the subconscious, the real and surreal, illusion and reality. It is a compact, sophisticated poetry intellectually vibrant but cast in colloquial diction—the poet as ventriloquist, doll and disinterested observer asking only to stay the night and leave the next morning:

> A carnival came to our mountain town, pitching its tents behind the shopping mall, where I visited the magician. . . . One rabbit slept in his rocker, and while I waited for the magician to return, I cradled it in my arms. I could have been anyone, a thief or a health inspector, someone given to sudden appearances. Rain fell over the metal roof. On the midway, the carnival rides were covered with tarpaulins, and as I looked out at the canvas murals of the miraculous and deformed, I thought of broad city squares, government plazas with no one walking in them, capitals of the world.
>
> ("Sudden Appearances")

Such is the presence of consciousness that it creates not the virtual reality of cyberspace but the poetic reality of human space. The mind with which we remember, like the light with which we seek, working on everything around us, illuminates the substance of what we know.

> When we lie down at night, we put aside our watchfulness and longing. Around us, the darkness shines. Perhaps one day, entering a tramontane village, we might find all that's lost to us, forms sheered off from their substances—sollerets and phaetons and mortsafes—still without rust in the rarefied air. . . . In the whole of the universe, who's to say the human form

> is right? Truly, we are capable of infinite variation, like the ocean our crossing takes small measure of, the whitecaps falling on one another like shadows of the possible world.
>
> ("The Beautiful and Invisible Tree That Rises Through the Universe for Which the Stars Are Leaves")

Liberated from metrical and intellectual conventionality by the reflexive rhythm of casual dialect and the idiosyncrasies of intense introspection against the backdrop of the world, this highly charged poetry expresses a magic of its own. By gathering all things in their resemblances between *its* mirrors, it creates a fresh poetry in our time and opens a way for new poetry in the next century.

—F.D. REEVE

## One Man's Paglia

Since we have license these days to read only what we want to, I decided I didn't have to read *Sexual Personae*. I did so on the basis of its final sentence, which I turned to first. It stopped me in my tracks:

> Voyeurism, vampirism, necrophilia, lesbianism, sadomasochism, sexual surrealism: Amherst's Madame de Sade still waits for her readers to know her (p. 673).

Which author is this a description of? Incredibly, the answer to the riddle is: Emily Dickinson. I thought it was, as the English say, "going a bit far" if feminism in its current lust for interesting women writers had to rediscover poor Emily as a scarified cultist in a Poe-like House of Hush. I had long ago been persuaded by Genevieve Taggard's evidence in *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (1930), a passionate and honest book, that there was indeed a special "day at summer's full" in Dickinson's life and a known, handsome lover (looking very like Stewart Granger in his

portrait). Thus I saw the violent images judged sadistic by Camille Paglia as not decadently aesthetic but lively images of a broken heart, and the mortuary themes not as necrophilia but as testimony to Dickinson's profound faith that she would meet her lover at death. Paglia was pulling from the poems knife imagery, axe imagery, guillotine imagery, even cutlery imagery, and crying "sadomasochism." But it seemed to me I could by the same method extract enough nut, kernel, hiding and nibbling imagery to prove the poems were written by a Squirrel.

I turned away. But then *Sulfur* 28 arrived (Spring 1991) with Paglia's reminiscence, "Milton Kessler"—and there was an immediate resonance with the sixties feeling. We all bloomed then. But it was soon apparent that there was more to Paglia's tribute to her teacher than nostalgia. "I despise academe as it is presently constituted." I couldn't believe my ears! "A whole generation of academics my age destroyed themselves chasing after Saussure and his Parisian disciples." I had never heard anyone say it (the "it" longing to be said) before. "Right now, at mid-career, they are waking up to the nullity of their work." Was it with these words or later that I got the feeling that Paglia is a true prophet among us? It probably took "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders" in *Arion* (Spring 1991)—or, for me, in the collected essays *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (Vintage, September 1992)—to convince me. We so initially doubt everything and everybody that it was probably not until she told the personal story behind the "Junk Bonds" essay that I knew I could trust her (it's the pages entitled "A Media History" in the above collection) and saw what I had missed through the seventies and eighties:

> When I received the two books from *Arion* and began to read them, I was horrified. Their sloppiness and trendiness revolted me, and I began to feel that serious issues of scholarly ethics now faced the profession. I wrote to Herbert Golder, detailing my concerns and asking what length he would set for a review-essay on these matters. He generously gave me carte blanche. In May I began work on the essay in earnest. To the disapproval of my great mentor, Harold Bloom, who felt I should be concentrating on my own career and getting Volume Two ready for publication, I set everything in my life aside and for six months did the research for "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders," my *Arion* exposé. I worked through the last twenty years of literary criticism, examining it afresh. What I found was even worse than I expected—a pattern of pretension, incompetence, and naked careerist greed (pp. 301–2).

And if the implication for all of us who have lived our lives in universities isn't entirely clear, I'll quote more:

> Over ten years ago it was obvious there was a problem, a terrible problem, but the academic establishment just sat on its duff, until the neoconservatives got hold of this issue. The reform of education *is* not a neoconservative issue! It is an issue facing the entire nation. So what I'm trying to do is to mobilize and radicalize the liberals who have been silent and who have let academe be taken over by these opportunists, these sickening, disgusting, ass-kissing opportunists ("The M.I.T. Lecture" in *Sex, Art, and American Culture* p. 252).

There is much in this vein, and it's humbling. We have left undone those things we ought to have done. Thank god Paglia is saying it. The loss of standards goes right through everything. I was told just this morning about somebody's son leaving a good preparatory school for McGill University in Montreal and finding it so easy to get A's that all he can do is to start an impromptu club of friends who compete to see *how little* work they must do to get an A. The lack of real demand is driving the best young people to cynicism. And I knew it fifteen years ago when I found people deserting my classes because I still gave C's, and flocking back to me when I had got in line with all A's and B's. We are supposed to offer tenderness to all students, but there's no way you can teach properly without hurting the feelings of people who can't keep up. We have been sacrificing the best for the doubtful benefit of the mediocre, and to make peace with the system.

Paglia will never top "Junk Bonds." She doesn't have to. There is some feeling that the second collection of essays, *Vamps and Tramps* (Vintage, November 1994), is a repeat performance without a star number. So be it. Even if "Junk Bonds" can't be matched, I don't mind hearing more on similar topics. It's only by repetition that we really believe that something has happened.

And what is it that has happened? The universities have produced a phenomenon out of the Zeitgeist. (Paglia's word—"I was not in control of my career when it was a disaster, and I am not in control of it now," she says in the introduction to the first collected essays.) Our time has gained a woman scholar who has her wits about her ("smarts" I suppose is the word) and who is determined not to lose them. One can't help making comparisons; Paglia herself doesn't hesitate. The essay "Sontag, Bloody Sontag" in the new volume is like a flashbulb; it's an intellectual centerfold. Consider how she sorts it out on the basis of her own visible strong point, scholarship:

> As happened to the scintillating Germaine Greer, Sontag's separation from the university weakened her work over the long haul. The discipline of academic scholarship can kill and deaden but also refine and strengthen major talents of Greer's and Sontag's dimension. Harold Bloom scribbled in the margin of a draft of my dissertation in 1971, "Mere Sontagisme!" It saddened me, but I knew Bloom was right. Sontag, who should have been Jane Harrison's successor as a supreme woman scholar, had become synonymous with a shallow kind of hip posturing (p. 345).

The yarn about Sontag, brought to Bennington at Paglia's youthful insistence, is a humdinger. Sontag was on celebrity time, dawdled over dinner, took a cheque which represented the total funds for speakers for the year, and, to a massive eager audience turned restless, read a boring short story she had just written. "It took me years to live down," writes Paglia. "Two decades later, when I began to be invited to lecture around the country, I remembered the lessons of that night. I have kept my speaker's fees unusually low, and I try to give maximum energy and effort to my performances" (p. 353). I don't know why, but I find those words distinctly moving.

But to pick up the reference to Jane Harrison: *that* is going to get me back into *Sexual Personae*. There was no mention of Harrison in the Emily Dickinson chapter, but I see from the index there are numerous earlier. I can look into Paglia's use of Harrison, whom I have long admired for *Themis* and the *Prolegomena*. Naw, I'll begin at the beginning of the book and read the whole thing!

—RALPH MAUD

## "Sweet Joy Befall Thee"

The memorial gathering invitation reads: "The artist Nora Jaffe," and that is how I remember my friend, along with my mother and my wife my closest

female companion. I remember her remarkable hands, their strength and firmness, as they would sheath mine in greeting. I once wrote of Nora's hands as pilgrims, or palmers, on their way to the destination drawing daily led them to—a destination to be found or undiscovered in the act of drawing, a destination, as I understand it, that always paid homage to the human body, not as expressionist or representational, but as the underscoring of formal decisions, so that while her finest work is formally resolved, the grandeur of the line is haunted by the source of every line: the fact that it issues from a pencil held by a hand linked to an arm on a woman's body. This relationship between the formal and the sexual—specifically a proud or bandaged male within the female—is uncompromising and eerie, and while it unsettled me at first, I soon realized that beyond the stimulation of Gorky and Bellmer I was facing, in Nora Jaffe's drawings and paintings, a unique 20th-century document: the enduring reality of the erotic and generative body as the contouring agent of the formal goal. The enturbulated eros of man is both the joyous and sorrowful weight in the webs of her searchings.

Nora's relationship to her art was antiphonal—she nourished it, it nourished her, and it had to, as, until late in her life when Virginia and Herbert Lust made a genuine commitment to publicly advance her work, she was nearly always on her own, often facing the hostility and revenge of our patriarchal art world against a woman with a commanding presence who had mastered form without jettisoning the physical world. While the lack of public access certainly hurt Nora, she was, to my knowledge, totally without bitterness or self-pity, and I must add here that during the last three years of her life when she was at times dreadfully ill and in unremitting pain, as someone who spoke with her weekly I never heard her complain. She told me that she accepted dying, that she had lived the life she wanted to live. A remarkable spirit, in other words, who had found a center in art, a center strong enough to support her without fame-injections from the periphery.

Nora was not my muse—she was a friend in art, a form of friendship redolent of inspiration and companionship. I love her very much, and I keep that verb in the present tense not only because the drawings, sculpture, and paintings we have of hers continue to amaze me, but because I continue to cherish our friendship as one that is realized and totally good. "Sweet Joy Befall Thee," she once wrote, in a catalogue of her work, as a dedication to Caryl and me, a line from William Blake's "Songs of Innocence." I think that was her wish for all of us, sweet joy today encircled by its mortal antagonist.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
[30 November 1994]

## Eric Mottram

"Live all you can" was the title of one of Eric Mottram's last books. That is exactly what he had been doing all along—until January 16, 1995, when he died after a short illness, brought down by massive multiple infections: no one single cause could have done it, of that I am sure. He'd celebrated his seventieth birthday just before New Year, an occasion marked by great festivities and two festschrifts with contributions from the wide range of friends, colleagues, students and fellow poets. He was a man of fantastic energies & gargantuan appetites: poetry & literature, of course, but also music, theatre, criticism, politics, food, flora, opera, comedy, film, hiking, gardening—in fact no cultural artifact escaped his eagerness, and if there could be righteous anger at anything found wanting (& there was much: he was a demanding man), pure delight (the laughter was Rabelaisian!) in the endless creativity of his fellow humans was the norm. He was a true "imagination of synthesis" (the title of one of Eric's most breathtaking seminars—he was the best teacher in & out of the classroom I have ever had) & that is exactly what he made of his & what he meant when he wrote: "The issue is the orphic difference between creators and others, between the perpetuation of myth and its agents, and the freedom of the creative process."

It is impossible to sum up the achievements in a few words. Here is how the editors of the festschrift *Alive in Parts of this Century: Eric Mottram at 70* introduce him: "Eric Mottram is one of the most important figures of postwar literature and teaching. He was the first to teach Beat writing in Europe in the 1950s, the first teacher of American Studies at the University of London, and a cofounder of the Institute of United States Studies in the University of London in 1963. He edited *Poetry Review* in 1972–75, ran the King's Poetry Series in 1967–80 and coedited *The New British Poetry* (1988). He has had two dozen collections of poetry published since the late 1960s including *Elegies, A Book of Herne,* and *Selected Poems*. . .he has published nearly 200 articles & over 20 critical works including a collection of essays on American culture, *Blood on the Nash Ambassador,* & the first essay full study of William Burroughs, *The Algebra of Need.*

The work remains, & it is promethean, & it was all done because, as he wrote in *Elegy 4: Against Tyranny:*

> hope is that all created life be rescued
> from tyranny  decay sloughed for a share
> in magnificence...

—PIERRE JORIS
Albany 1/18/95

Somebody said, "I can't take anyone seriously who dresses like Davy Crockett." But with Whitmanesque hair and beard, stained leather vest, Western hat, outdoor boots, a bearclaw necklace around his throat, Bill was more Joaquin Miller, or the "hawk-hearted" bandit Murietta whose pickled head sat in a jar on the sheriffs desk in an early poem from *The Residual Years*. Bill taught a class at Santa Cruz in a huge makeshift Buckminster Fuller dome of warped plywood set out in a parking lot. The class had a local reputation because Bill would stand and brood and meditate and thunder for a couple of hours a week and no one was permitted to interrupt. I looked in once and saw all the students lying about derelict, either asleep or doodling in notebooks, and never went back. But I saw him at poetry readings—instant attraction to that blue eye full of humorous sparks. The crashing poetry. The thunderous self-dramatization. Aah! that's how you want to get old, I thought.

It was when I got interested in book arts that I went looking for Bill. At the invitation of Rita Bottoms, Special Collections librarian at U.C. Santa Cruz, Bill had arrived and established the Lime Kiln Press in a lower room of the library. The press might have been named for Jeffers' poem "Bixby Landing." More likely for the abandoned lime kilns that litter the redwood forests around Santa Cruz—crumbling pits and towers of stone they could have been ancient fortresses, older and more blasted than any Rhone Valley rampart from Eleanor of Aquitaine's time—though these deserted furnaces of California only date a hundred years back. Several notable ones lie scattered around the Santa Cruz campus.

This was early Spring of 1978. I asked Bill could I work with him on some printing project. Letterpress printing as a craft interested me, and I had a sense of myself as a poet. Here was a man who did both. The Lime Kiln Press, operating under the auspices of the University, was a regular college course and Bill's assistants were enrolled students. I realized my request was irregular. Maybe it was my enthusiasm for Ananda Coomaraswamy's writings, books which had been important to Bill, maybe he noticed how I could talk about the obscure Essex House Press and the type fonts of Eric Gill—these things interested him. I wasn't a student but he told me to come around and work with his small group of apprentices. I joined them partway through work on the current book—an edition of Bill's poem "Blame it on the Jet Stream," which he'd declaimed at graduation for the University's Kresge College a year or two earlier. It's a wild poem, very much Jeffers in spirit. It gets at both the furious coastal California weather patterns of the jet-stream years, and the equally notable violence that stunned Santa Cruz in the early 1970s. On the model of Gilroy

the "garlic capital" and Castroville the "artichoke capital," locals had taken to calling Santa Cruz the "mass murder capital of the world." Underneath its counterculture veneer a lot of killing had gone down.

It's a tough prophetic poem, "Blame it on the Jet Stream," with long lines—Whitman in cadence but all Jeffers in how it pins a steady cold eye on violence and sacrament. Now Bill was seeing it wrought into most elegant form. Not so ambitious or risky a project as *Granite & Cypress,* the Jeffers book Bill had printed at Lime Kiln, and which had restored his reputation after a long absence from printing. But then that book, bound into a case of Monterey cypress and inset with granite from Jeffers' own quarry, had been a tribute to the one poet Bill called master.

We worked the Acorn handpress, same design, nearly the same device as the old Washington Bill bought when he'd drifted down the coast to Berkeley after the war, and which he'd used to help found the Bay Area renaissance.

> *. . .once it is made ready, the right impression achieved, and the bearing-off points placed on the bed; once printing is begun and the run fairly under way, it moves into the work with a wonderful dispatch, its very spareness stands it in stead; and so perfectly gauged are its meeting parts that I do not see how, impression for impression, any handpress could do better*

We labored the thick ink. I'd never seen such stuff before, digging it from a battered tin with a spatula, hammering it with a wooden mallet till it was pliant enough to cover the hand-held rubber roller, laying it across the bed of Goudy Modern type. We lifted the dampened paper, fed sheets into the frisket. Everyone levered the great horizontal handle of polished wood which screwed down to achieve the impression. In words it sounds easy, but it took months of painstaking labor, checking our handiwork at every click of the press. People were in good humor, particularly Bill who was telling the story again and again of Susanna kicking him out of their shack at Kingfisher Flat. I think he'd moved back in at this point. He recounted the story with amusement, swaggering and cocky, you could feel the pain underneath. He was sixty-six years old. A young Cherokee woman—Bill said she was twenty-eight—had something to do with it. She used to sit with him at poetry readings in the cafes. I bet she was the last woman: the last before he began to dramatically & publicly suffer his impotence—anguished days memorialized in Masks of Drought.

We finished the print run of *Jet Stream.* Pages with their sharp blue & black print; the woodcut of Bill as a frontispiece; the hidden watermark—"Veronica's napkin" he showed me, his eye moist when he held a page up to backlight the watermark, so I knew it was sexiness more than piety in

the image that drew him—though he adored the paper itself, that was what mattered when you got down to craft, how its fibers expanded & took the swift keen bite of lead and ink.

The semester ran out at school and all the students drifted away. Suddenly working alone with him I noticed his eyes were giving him trouble and the first discernible tremblings of Parkinson's had set in. I'd watched him occasionally lift a printed sheet to the light while others fed the press, screwing his whiskers and eyeglasses up to question how the ink had taken. But nothing seemed wrong. Thinking back, I believe it was hard to see well in that enclosed lower room, despite the overhead lights.

We met upstairs in the Special Collections library to collate the sheets one day. The campus was empty, the college kids gone for the summer. A big airy room, long polished oak tables, sunlight filtered through redwood trees coming in the large windows. Excellent light to judge the quality of the printing.

> *. . .with the handpress, more than any other device, everything resolves back to the self.*

We laid the pages out on tables in sequential order and started to collect them into books. The two or three librarians kept a quiet distance but the room rippled with tension. Another of Bill's exacting books was nearly ready to go to the binder. Bill hardly said a word to anyone. On the walls ten of Kenneth Patchen's picture poems looked down—bold, funny, unrestrained. Cartoonlike. Probably the antithesis of the nearly perfected book art Bill hankered after, had spent his life chasing though history. Broadsides and posters to him were simply ephemera. "Our keepsake mad country," he once wrote. Bill was in thrall of the Book. He called it an archetype. That's why he wanted to build it from first page to last.

I heard a terrifying moan. I thought he was sick. Bill's hands were shaking uncontrollably, worse than I'd seen them. Parkinson's has an emotional element, he once told me. Self-consciousness or distress often brought him to an excess of shaking. A dried sheet of *Jet Stream* was rattling violently in his hands. It sounded like wind in the leathery California live oak leaves of our hills. His face was pale, haunted, inaccessible. Then, not suddenly, but as though it had been years in the making, a cry dragged up out of him—drawn from some dreadfully deep place—

> "Forgive me!"

A low keening, each syllable painfully prolonged, an old man's howl of spiritual pain. It might not have even been loud. But it was dreadful, and it came out again. "Forgive me—" I studied him, sideways, and kept to my

sorting. Pages clearly off-register, with any stray glancing of ink, or muddied rather than bitten by type, these I set aside. A few unfortunate thumb prints. And all day as we gathered up sheets he would draw a page close to his face, nearly knocking his glasses off, so fearsomely did his hands shake. Craft secrets lay there—intricacies of fiber expanded by moisture and cut by lead type edges. Ink quality, the exacting process of pounding & laying on ink. My eyes could not detect what he was seeing. What he was seeing defeated him. Then that keening, so bitter, like the poem he had written—

> *For, with the handpress, more than any other printing device everything resolves back to the self. When the results are spotty almost certainly it is one's own fault—rarely the press's. Somewhere you erred. . .*

I saw how much with him they were devotions—both the poetry and the printing, devotions—devotions to a God he'd spent his whole life struggling with, tooth and claw. Raging against. Simpering up to. How he'd run just as much from as towards that God. How a failure in his craft didn't just mean a piece of botched art, something to rectify another day—it implicated his life, his strength, his devotion. Sitting there in his skin & claw & bead clothing he looked irredeemably pagan, all that wildness you travel distant dangerous places just to catch a whiff of—all of it there, in him, like in some lair. Rattling in his hands sheet after sheet of that poetic evocation of violence and wildness. "Forgive me." His eye taking note of no poetry. Only the printer's errancy—

> *This coast, like all beautiful places, crying out for tragedy.*

I guess I learned more of religion that harrowing day than any book ever told me. Hour after hour punctuated by Bill's unalterable "Forgive me." He was too wild for piety. Bill gauged himself by a God I cannot understand, years of thinking about it has given me just a scant glimpse. A God I could certainly never bow down to. Critics and poets often dismiss what they call his self-dramatization. Let them. That intimate frightful irrepressibly wild behavior—all the defeat and dread and self-mortification driving his voice—spoke to something "out there." *Out there.* Past the critics. Past books. Way past understanding. So far that even bowing can't touch it.

> *Part of the terror of it, too, is that whatever you write and have published you can never escape; it follows you everywhere you live. That is also the problem of the printer: every book that he*

*has spoiled by putting his hand to it will also hound him down through the ages.*

Bill had a hellhound on his trail. That's why the books are so good.

* * *

We're in the crowded little outbuilding underneath the redwoods at Kingfisher Flat. It's the building Bill uses for his study. Several miles back from the coast. My faded blue Pontiac lines up alongside his Landrover in the clearing ringed by *Sequoia sempervirens,* the towering cathedral redwoods. Behind his cabin winds the creek, through the forests and down to the jagged Homeric shoreline of Davenport, where nineteenth-century whalers set out to strike the Grey Whales migrating our coast. Inland the cabin's crammed with books and papers—a massive table stacked in disorder with reading matter, books & letters, file cabinets overflowing, closet doors forced back by cartons. He has been rummaging for his manuscript *American Bard.*

Bill keeps uncovering mementos of his printer's craft and dragging them out to show me. Old woodblock prints, drawers of type, proofsheets and discards. Books from well-known presses, and presses I've never heard of. Back in the corner his Washington handpress. "Our keepsake mad country." Only the book interests him. I push him a bit—telling him about the Bible in Houston some pioneer bound in Indian skin. If Bill ever gets pious it's about archetypes, and the Book is a key one for him. He gives me a long look, then digs for something else.

It's the legendary printer's dream he worked on in 1953, the year I was born—*Novum Psalterium PII XII.* This is the Psalter he set about printing at St. Albert's Priory in Oakland. He had to get permission to take on such a highly irregular work. Many regard it as the finest piece of craft printing ever achieved on this continent. Maybe the finest piece of craft printing *abandoned* is the right way to tell it. He's recounted the story in essays and interviews. Look it up if you want. After he fled the project, a wealthy collector got hold of his exquisite pages, had a commercial printer finish the job, got the thing bound. It's a hybrid, a chimera. There're only sixty-four copies. On the colophon page his copy says number two.

"I had number One sent to the Pope," he tells me. "Number Two I kept for myself. And number Three went to Cardinal Spellman. Sometimes people ask, well Bill, where do you stand with the Church these days? I tell them the Pope received the first *Psalterium.* Number two came to me. Spellman got number three. That's where I stand."

His blue eye moist with amusement in that cascade of white hair.

* * *

A couple of years later, after I'd more or less lost contact with Bill Everson, I chanced to be back in Santa Cruz when Robert Bly came through town to give a reading. It was at that big modern church on High Street, and the hall held quite a few hundred people. The audience was milling about getting settled when I arrived—a lot of folk in from the hills. I took a seat somewhere in the center of the auditorium. Bly was there early, up front speaking with friends. I glanced back and saw Bill arrive, stooped by his Parkinson's now and holding a cane. He looked old as granite but shifted down the aisle with dignity and restraint. A young friend had him by the arm. They found some seats ten rows from the stage, had to climb past a number of people to get there, and it was a struggle for Bill to get in at all. I thought I'd wait to speak to him until he was settled—it took all his concentration to get that troubled, awkward, shaking old body down an aisle, into a seat, and stabilized.

Bly glanced around at the crowds coming in the rear doors. He looked over and saw Bill. "Bill, Bill—" he called in delight, and raced up the aisle, working his way through a cluster of people to reach his old acquaintance. I saw him beaming with pleasure, leading Bill tenderly by the hand, down to a seat in the front row.

The reading began. It featured some talk on "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the Wallace Stevens poem, some Kabir and Mirabai versions repeated to the dulcimer, a good deal of soapboxing. Bly was at the height of his romance with the pagan counterculture and twenty or thirty minutes into the reading he got round to the topic of monotheism—in those days a subject he cherished, a demon to drag on stage and publicly whip. The audience was right with him, a crowd of brightly dressed long-haired dope-smokers, surfers, organic farmers, college students, foresters, marine biologists, bakers. He snapped out a few jokes—

"I am an only God and a jealous God—"

"Well if you're an only God what are you jealous of—?"

And following the open vein, pilloried what he branded "monotheism." Jew, Christian, Muslim, didn't matter. Got to get past it. Return to something colorful, pagan, and full of mothers. He was enjoying himself, had his jokes at hand, he looked very pink up there under the lights in his flowered shirt, the dulcimer set on a little wood table. The freaks who'd come in from the mountains were with him. Suddenly he started, his eyes narrowing towards the rear of the hall—"Bill! Bill, where are you going?" Something broke. You could hear the seats creak as everyone strained to look back to the

vanishing point at which Bly stared in confoundment. And there was old Bill Everson, fleeing up the side aisle, cane abandoned and arms swimming to stay on his feet, almost in slow motion, hair and beard streaming out under his broad-brimmed hat, fleeing in a reflex of horror. "Bill. . .?" And Bill, muttering, muttering, eyes wild, scarcely able to turn his old neck, managing to stammer out a few words, "Leaving, leaving, damn right, I'm leaving—"

Words drawn out with the keening I'd heard that day in the library. And the fury of a God he'd struggled thirty years with flew alongside him. You don't need monotheism. Outside it was storming. In his buckskin jacket he looked feral and horrified. I believe I could see lightening dart from his beard. And he crashed through the great double doors at the back of the church and was gone alone in the night.

Bly shuffled some papers, looking down hard, then in a considerably weakened voice read a considerably weak poem with a surrealist bent. After which he sank straight back onto a chair, rubbed a hand over his face, and said in a bewildered tone to no one in particular, "That was weird—really, really weird."

—ANDREW SCHELLING

# CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

WILL ALEXANDER has two books of poetry forthcoming this spring: *Asia & Haiti* (Sun & Moon), and *The Stratospheric Canticles* (Pantograph Press). As translator, WILSON BALDRIDGE collaborated with Suzanne Jacob on the multimedia book *Filandere Cantabile* (Marval, 1990). His essay on Michel Deguy appeared in *Symposium* 41 (1987). CHARLES BERNSTEIN's most recent book is *Dark City* (Sun & Moon). *Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984* has been reissued by Sun & Moon. Editions du Seuil (Paris) has just published MICHEL DEGUY's *A ce qui n'en finit pas,* a book-length threnody on the death of his wife. Recent "Drafts" by RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS appear in *Chelsea* and *Hambone,* and a translated "Draft" is in *Action Poetique.* AVIVA BOWER lives in Tampere, Finland; this is her first publication. LINH DINH has a short story forthcoming in *New Observations;* he is a recipient of a PEW Fellowship. JEAN DONNELLY has recently published work in *Situations, To: A Journal of Prose, Poetry & the Visual*

*Arts,* and *No Roses Review.* Her chapbook, "the julia set," will be published in spring 1995 by Edge Books. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's most recent books are a translation of César Vallejo's *Trilce,* and *Under World Arrest.* PETER GIZZI is the author of *Periplum* (Avec Books); "Caption" is from a work-in-progress entitled "A Textbook of Chivalry." PIERRE JORIS's most recent book is *Winnatou Old* (Meow Press). This spring Sun & Moon will publish *Breathturn,* the first of three volumes of Paul Celan translations. MYUNG MI KIM is the author of *The Bounty* (forthcoming from Chax Press) and *Under Flag* (Kelsey St. Press). "Hummingbird" is the last section of a book-length poem titled "Dura." DREW MILNE edits *Parataxis: Modernism and Modern Writing.* Recent publications include *Sheet Mettle* (Alfred David Editions, London) and *How Peace Came* (Equipage, Cambridge). SPENCER SELBY's most recent books are *Sound Off* (Detour) and *Malleable Cast,* a collection of visual poems just published by Generator press. GAVIN SELERIE lives in London. His long poem "Roxy," begun in 1985, is now virtually complete. A sonnet sequence, *Tilting Square,* was published in 1992. CHARLES STEIN's most recent book of poems is *The Hat Rack Tree* (Station Hill Press). JOHN TAGGART's most recent publications include *Remaining In Light: Ant Meditations On A Painting By Edward Hopper* (SUNY Press) and *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry & Poetics* (U. of Alabama Press). SHARON THESEN lives in Vancouver, where she is editing, with RALPH MAUD, the Charles Olson/Francis Boldereff correspondence (a small part of which appeared in *Sulfur* #31); her book of poems, *Aurora* (Coach House Press, Toronto), is forthcoming. MARJORIE WELISH's most recent book of poems is *Casting Sequences* (U. of Georgia Press); she is a recipient of a grant from the International Studio Program. A solo show of paintings may be seen at the E.M. Donahue Gallery, NYC, in May. PAMELA WYE teaches Art Criticism at SUNY-New Paltz. She recently published a catalog essay on Jeffrey Wasserman's paintings for Bill Maynes Gallery, NYC.

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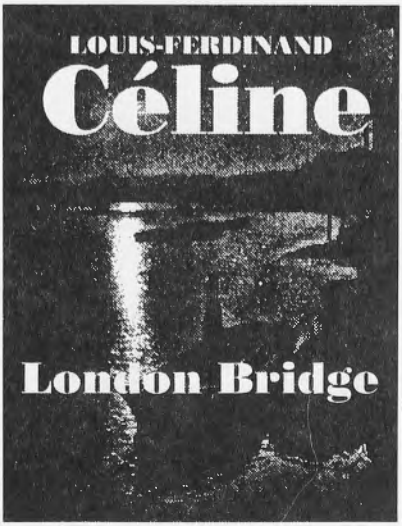


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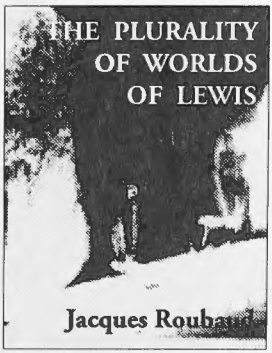


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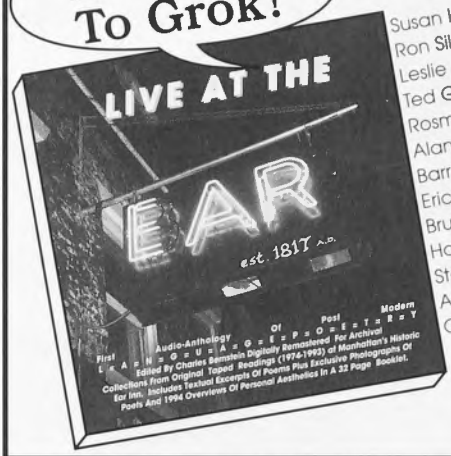
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